

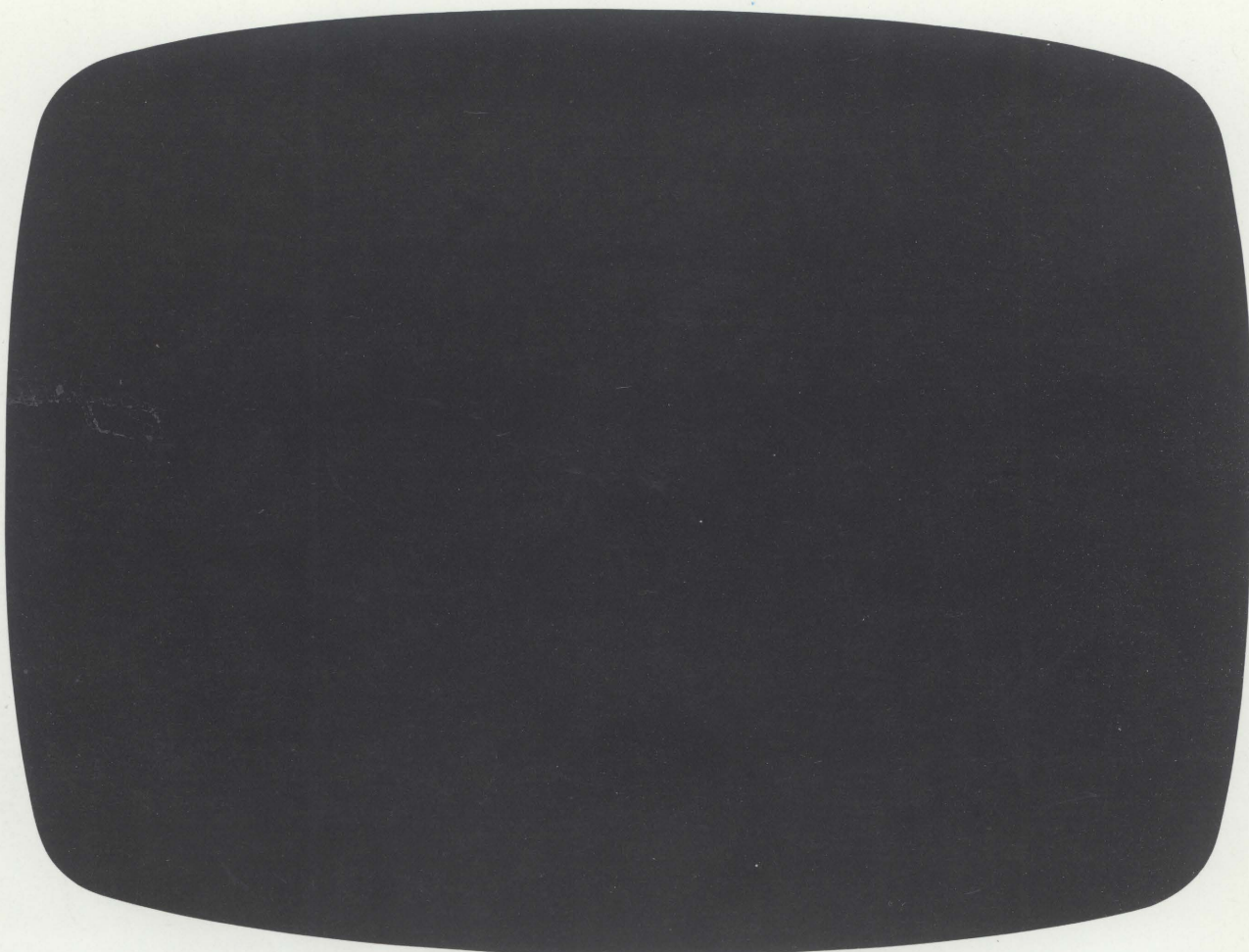
SIGHT & SOUND

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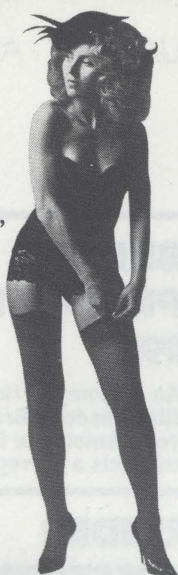
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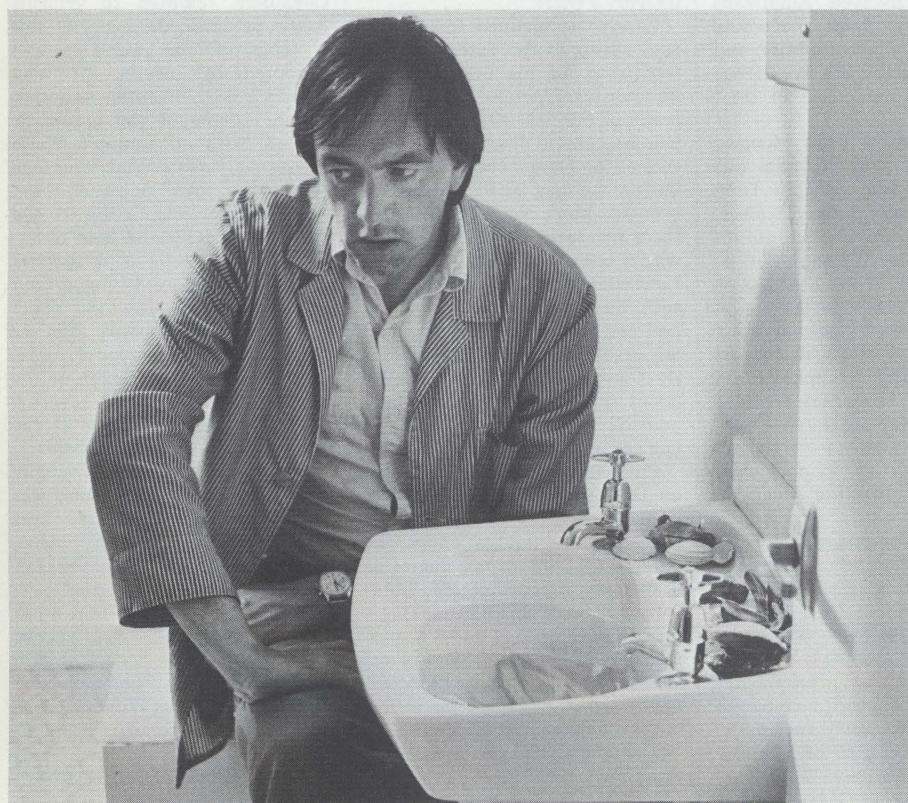
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IN THE PICTURE





Local Hero

Texas oil and Scottish guile:
(far left) Peter Capaldi, oilman;
(above) Burt Lancaster, the tycoon
Happer; (left) director Bill Forsyth.
Photographs by Graham Attwood.
See report on page 226.

IN THE PICTURE

Local heroes

Is Bill Forsyth as good as they say, or is he only as good as 'Gregory's Girl'?

Drawing parallels between the actual filming of *Local Hero* and its subject matter becomes almost irresistible. Writer-director Bill Forsyth's tale, his most ambitious assignment to date, deals with the efforts of an American oil corporation to site a massive refining project in and around a Scottish fishing village. Far from opposing the scheme, the canny inhabitants are positively encouraging, as they realise there is black gold in the rigs. And so it was when David Puttnam's production descended on its chosen location north of Aberdeen, to find some of the locals apparently out to take the 'fillum' folk for everything they could. Once the greedier elements were sorted out, everything was to go pretty smoothly for the five million dollar production, which is wholly British financed. Shooting was divided between locations on the East and West coasts of Scotland, apart from an initial establishing week in Houston, Texas. There, one of the technicians commented: 'We had more oil executives playing extras than we had people playing oil executives.'

The much-praised *Gregory's Girl* was a long-term project for Forsyth. Unable to get it off the ground, he embarked on *That Sinking Feeling* (1979) with really no money at all, using a young cast from the Glasgow Youth Theatre. 'I had enough technicians around me to make the film,' he says, 'all friends I had worked with on documentaries. We all learned a lot on the film, which I don't remember being that much fun since we were so short of time and money.'

That Sinking Feeling, which has since had a sparse theatrical release as well as a BBC showcase, brought Forsyth to the attention of producers Davina Belling and Clive Parsons. They then backed *Gregory's Girl*, which was budgeted at about £190,000, with financial input from the National Film Finance Corporation and Scottish tv. Ironically, David Puttnam was one of the producers who had turned down *Gregory's Girl*, which was to go on to win several domestic awards, glean quite extraordinary praise from the critics, rack up a very respectable box-office gross and then open to good business in New York (with a little help from a redubbed soundtrack).

It was while *Gregory's Girl* was being edited that Puttnam suggested he and Forsyth might work together on a project. The one they eventually settled on was apparently developed from a newspaper cutting found by Puttnam. 'In common with every other



'Local Hero': Denis Lawson and Peter Riegert.

Scottish film-maker, I thought there was a story to be made out of the oil business,' says Forsyth. 'I suppose most people saw it in a dramatic way, with oil rigs and mountainous waves. I didn't relish the idea of two months clambering around hard, cold metal girders heaving about in the sea, so I diverted it from the hardware. It seemed to me the human things were more interesting. I saw it along the lines of a Scottish 'Beverly Hillsbillies'. What would happen to a small community if it suddenly became immensely rich? That was the first comic idea and the story built itself from there. It seemed a similar thing to *Brigadoon*, which also involved Americans coming to Scotland, becoming part of a small community and being changed by the experience and affecting the place in their own way.'

While Forsyth was writing *Local Hero*, David Puttnam was reaping the first rewards from another modestly budgeted piece, *Chariots of Fire*. The film's Oscars signalled an explosion at what is known in the business as the 'ticket wickets' in the us. A brilliantly orchestrated marketing campaign by Warners, in concert with the Ladd Company, has resulted in a box-office gross of more than \$50m in North America alone. Unusually for a British film (although its finance had been a curious blend of American and Egyptian cash), *Chariots of Fire* was able to recoup its negative cost in the UK alone, if a profitable television sale is taken into account.

Local Hero seems bound to be judged as the follow-up to Puttnam and Forsyth's previous but separate successes. A member of the unit put it pretty succinctly: 'People are going to be gunning for both David and Bill. One would assume there'll be an awful

lot of people who would not be exactly heartbroken if they didn't win the awards next year.' Puttnam himself emphasises the timing. 'If we were starting from scratch, it would be a worry. But we were so far along by the time the Oscar thing came around that I have not felt any concern. It's not as if this project was merely concocted on the wave of a success. As far as Bill is concerned, he's a very bright man and he knows in his heart of hearts that *Gregory's Girl* was an overpraised film. And that does, I think, present him with some problems. In a way, he's using *Local Hero* to test himself. Is he as good as they say, or is he only as good as *Gregory's Girl*?'

Forsyth is inclined to be reticent—even to the extent of preferring to let his first assistant director utter 'action' and 'cut' on many of the less intimate scenes. But he cannot disguise his pleasure at the benefits far the biggest budget he has dealt with have brought him. Not the least of these pleasures has been working with a veteran superstar like Burt Lancaster—'I could make films with him for ever.' The budget has not, he says, made him feel any greater burden of responsibility. 'Actually, I've felt a bit guilty about that. The fact is, I've just enjoyed everything the budget has brought to the film.'

Puttnam, who keeps his finger on the pulse via the number of industry matters he is involved with, has no doubts about the outcome. 'I think it is going to be immensely successful and, ironically, I can see this film making a lot of money in the United States. *Chariots of Fire* still amazes me. Of course I would have been disappointed if it hadn't made five million dollars. But fifty million? No, that really never crossed my mind.'

QUENTIN FALK

Zagreb festival

Animation without the attraction of surprise

Nothing in competition at Zagreb's fifth world festival of animated films approached the determined intelligence of each film in the Jerzy Kucia retrospective. The welcome opportunity to see Kucia's work in sequence revealed how the Polish poet philosopher of animation has developed his first fascination with light and movement (*The Return*, 1972) into increasingly dense explorations of time. If his latest film, *The Wellspring*, had been in competition, Zagreb's Grand Prix would never have been in doubt.

A wise and diligent jury chose not to award a Grand Prix this year, rightly declaring after an all night sitting that 'not one film could be singled out combining meaningful content and new forms.' Their awards showed their eagerness to encourage animators groping into new areas. They saluted the individual elements of several somewhat daunting films: the graphic art of Zoltan Szilagyi's baffling *Arena*, the music of Dennis Pus' sensual *Hard Passage* and the sound effects of Viviane Elnecave's hallucinatory *Luna, Luna, Luna*. Their prize in the longest category went to *The Lost World*, an equally demanding work by Antti Kuri and Jukka Ruohomaki.

The most popular winners were, of course, the briskest and most pointed comedies. Richard Condie's *Pig Bird* warns Canadians tempted to smuggle exotic pets into the country with a fable of the whole nation devoured by insects. Bretislav Pojar's *E* is an inventive variation on the theme of the emperor's clothes, with an emperor whose policemen ensure that everyone shares the royal point of view. And Ndeljko Dragic's *Way to the Neighbour* featured a hero bursting with well-being as he showers and dresses before driving a tank out of his garage. The local Yugoslav audience relished this as much as they applauded *Projekt*, Jiri Barta's sharp comment on the architectural habit of expecting people to be as uniform as the apartments designed for them.

For once Britain, which usually shines at animation events, was thinly represented. Its best entries, Chris James' *After Beardsley* and Graeme Jackson and Bob Godfrey's *Instant Sex*, were already familiar from other festivals. But two crisp entries from St. Martin's School of Art, Agur Schiff's *Weekend Epic* and Ravi Swami's *Just Walking*, both demonstrated promising student talent.

The National Film Board of Canada was represented with an

admirably varied selection. *A Soul with Souls* by Pierre Veilleux revealed a mesmerising, exceptionally dexterous animator. Janet Perlman's *Tender Tale of Cinderella Penguin* had her usual wit and a fresh charm. And Ishu Patel's *Top Priority* angrily recounted a tale of Indian peasants finding that military hardware took precedence over their desperate need for water.

Rumoured budget cuts made no dents in Zagreb's traditionally benign hospitality. But the films this year undeniably left a sense of some disappointment. Too many animators are becoming too predictable. When they neglect their capacity to astonish us, they lose more than they seem to realise.

DEREK HILL

Across the border

A Hong Kong director shoots in China

Ann Hui was already looking forward to making a film about Vietnam more than three years ago. For the better part of this year, she's been doing it: shooting for four months on locations in China, then editing at home in Hong Kong. The original plan was to tell the story of the 'boat people', at the time a major social problem in Hong Kong, which had accepted more Vietnamese refugees than any other country. Several rewrites later, it has become an even more ambitious film, a panoramic account of the Communist takeover of South Vietnam after the US withdrawal in 1975. The tentative English title is *The Foreign Friend*, because the central character is a 'friendly' Japanese photo-journalist, who returns to Vietnam in 1978 to document the progress of the Revolution.

Quite a number of Hong Kong movies have been shot in China since the 1950s, but always by or through one of the three 'left-wing' production companies in the colony. Allen Fong's *Father and Son*, for instance, used China locations for its fantasy sequences about a hero of the anti-Japanese war. *The Foreign Friend* is a rather different case. It was produced by a new independent company called Bluebird Films, founded and managed by the former actress Xia Meng, one of the most popular stars of Hong Kong 'left-wing' movies in the 50s and 60s. And it was financed by a 'behind-the-scenes' businessman, one of an increasing number in Hong Kong who have unexportable capital tied up in China. For their part, the Chinese authorities provided location facilities, some of the cast and crew and throngs of extras in return for the domestic distribution rights. Now

that Bluebird has set the pattern, several other Hong Kong independents are actively exploring the possibilities of mounting 'made-in-China' productions of their own.

It suited Ann Hui to film in China because, quite obviously, she has no access to Vietnam itself. She based her script on many hours of interviews with refugees, and shot in areas of South-West China that resemble Vietnam topographically and betray some of the same French influences in their architecture. When I visited her on location in the port city of Zhanjiang, I found the crew busily decorating a local hotel with English notices and portraits of Ho Chi-Minh, producing almost hallucinatorily plausible images of a setting—and a society—in chaotic transition. I later saw rushes shot in Hainan Island, which stood in for Vietnam's 'New Economic Zones', and found that they had effected an equally convincing transformation of the countryside. Judging by the footage I saw, Hui has risen to the challenge of her subject, and her direction of actors has never been stronger.

Festival-goers who admired Hui's first three features (*The Secret*, *The Spooky Bunch* and *The Story of Woo Viet*, the latter shown in the Cannes Directors' Fortnight this year) may not appreciate how much rides on *The Foreign Friend*. By working in China, Hui and her stars risk having their past and future work blacked in Taiwan—a territory that many Hong Kong producers still consider a vital export market. Hui accepts the risk of unemployment philosophically. 'If I have to, I'll start my own company and go on making films in China.'

TONY RAYNS

Durban

Producing a groundswell for less censorship and wider choice

Some festival directors have a harder job than others. But any competition for sheer audacity and tenaciousness would surely be won by Ros Sarkin, organiser of the London-modelled festival in Durban, South Africa. This year, there were forty movies on display and, because of the cultural boycott, almost every one had to be fought for rather beyond the call of duty. Mrs Sarkin, a Progressive Party member of the Durban City Council, can be seen regularly at the London festival, telling filmmakers and their representatives that the Durban festival is wholly multiracial, that apartheid is anathema to everyone connected with it and that people of all races in South Africa are starved of the very sort of films that are most likely to effect a general change of attitudes.

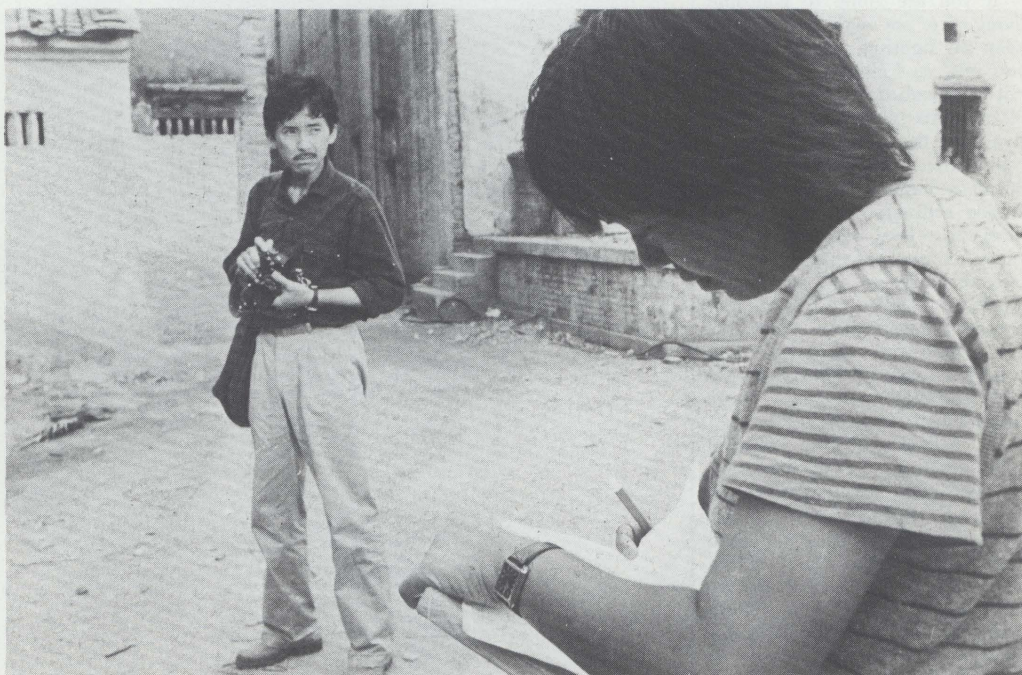
She is very persuasive. And her triumph this year was to get Charles Burnett, the black American director, to send his *Killer of Sheep*. There was also a group of Third World films at the festival, including Lino Brocka's *Bona*, Lester Peries' *Village in the Jungle* and Cherd Songsri's *The Scar*, and radical American documentaries like *Rosie the Riveter* and *The Day After Trinity*. Mrs Sarkin also argued Bertolucci into sending *Tragedy of a Ridiculous Man*, Helma Sanders-Brahms into allowing *No Mercy No Future* and *Germany, Pale Mother* to be shown and got a good many other doubts into the programme. Bertolucci, she says, was easy. She sat for an hour with him in a London park after

he had said to her: 'All right, tell me why I should.' In all, 30,000 tickets were sold at the festival and presumably a few minds broadened.

Three South African films were shown to particular acclaim. One was *Awake From Mourning*, about the self-help movement among Soweto women following the 1976 riots. That has already been shown here, and the ovation accorded to Ellen Khuzwayo, one of the four leaders who created the Maggie Magaba Trust in 1979, must have helped to compensate her for the refusal of the South African Government to give her permission to travel to London for the NFT showing.

The other South African films were *This We Can Do for Justice*, Kevin Harris' tribute to Bishop Desmond Tutu and the Rev Peter Storey of the South African Council of Churches, and Helena Nogueira's *Fugard's People*, a full-length film which attempts to understand the playwright through his working methods. Unfortunately, some of Fugard's black performers were prevented from taking part for contractual reasons, but there is a fascinating interview with Yvonne Bryceland. And clearly Fugard on Fugard can be almost as dramatic as the plays themselves.

The festival got itself into some trouble with the censorship board in Pretoria for screening two films—*No Mercy No Future* and Makavejev's *Montenegro*. The Sanders-Brahms film was regarded at first as unshowable, being both pornographic and blasphemous in the eyes of the authorities. But somehow Mrs Sarkin managed it, and on a Sunday too. But just once, and to a carefully screened audience of 'psychologists and doctors'. Afterwards, there was a forum on stage



Ann Hui at work on *'The Foreign Friend'*.

at which even a Minister of the Dutch Reformed Church decided it was not blasphemous, though he did insist that it should be proscribed. The packed audience, by no means all psychologists and doctors, voted overwhelmingly in the film's favour.

Montenegro was shown several times, with crowds battering on the doors to get in and students making up all sorts of unlikely reasons why they had to see it. The mechanical dildo, however, was cut, by order of the vice squad, after the first performance—a fairly small price to pay for freedom of expression. There are worse in South Africa just now.

The festival's attempt, for instance, to take some films into the black townships surrounding Durban was effectively aborted by the appalling conditions in the township cinemas in the way of projection and sound, notably at Umlazi. But 200 turned up there to see *Awake From Mourning*, as did the Mayor and leaders of the community. Many of them enquired afterwards why no other films made by blacks were shown to them. Was it the South African authorities, or didn't non-South African blacks care about their isolation?

There are other plans for next year, involving the use of the festival's own equipment, since Africans have few cars and cannot travel into Durban for festival screenings because of the distances involved. The large and richer Durban Indian community, however, supported the festival well, despite the absence, again for political reasons, of any Indian product. Mrs Sarkin also failed to get any BFI Production Board films, despite several requests. She does not, apparently, win every time.

'If you are going to continue living here,' she says, 'you have to keep on fighting, particularly if you feel, as I do, that films are not only culturally valuable but instruments for change. The festival has been running for four years now and has already produced a large groundswell here among ordinary filmgoers of all races for less censorship and wider choice. Last year, for example, we could never have shown *No Mercy No Future*, *Céleste* and at least a dozen others. This year the audience reaction has been totally different, the censorship less restrictive and many more people have bought tickets. I don't believe cultural isolation solves anything. I do believe that the spirit of apartheid can be weakened by the sort of contact with outside realities that a good film festival can provide. And if black film-makers like Horace Ové knew how thrilled South African blacks would be to see his films, I think he could easily be persuaded to show them here.'

DEREK MALCOLM

Dilys

Lunch with Britain's longest-serving film critic

Dilys Powell celebrated her 80th birthday in July—as busy as ever, with two weekly deadlines to meet, covering the new releases for *Punch* and the films on television for the *Sunday Times*, as well as broadcasting commitments. She must be the longest-serving member of the London film press, perhaps the only one who can remember what press shows were like before the second war. (More exclusive, it appears, with the critics kept in stately isolation.) A film-maker, probably with no particular love for the critics, once called her the fairest in the land. There would be little disagreement anywhere about that, or about the responsiveness, openness and sense of balance which have kept her on a straight course through forty-odd years of professional filmgoing. She has, of course, always enjoyed films; which helps.

It is not easy, though, to get Dilys Powell to talk about the past. She is probably too much of a weekly deadline journalist for that, and a lunchtime conversation, embarked on with vague notions of asking about then and now, predictably ends up with

more emphasis on now, *Fitzcarraldo* and other current releases and her determination to get to the Barbican's Keaton season. She has never published any collection of her reviews. Had she, we asked, been tempted to join the flock of critics doing stints as visiting professors at American universities? 'They haven't asked me. In any case I'm not a teacher but a writer. Writing is what I always wanted to do.'

She took her degree at Oxford—returning to Somerville after being rusticated for two terms (not sent down, as some accounts have it) after the classic mischance of being caught shining over the college wall. She married the archaeologist Humfry Payne, spent much time in Greece until his accidental death in 1936, then came home to pick up earlier connections with the *Sunday Times*. In 1939 she became film critic, she says by the simple expedient of asking for the job. 'There goes my nice new job,' she thought at the outbreak of war, when it seemed cinemas might close. But from then on she and Caroline Lejeune of the *Observer* were the 'Sunday ladies', fixed points in the landscape. 'Caroline taught us all how to write about films,' she says.

At press shows Dilys Powell has always been famous for sitting as close as possible to the screen. 'If

you sit at the back you're observing; close to you are in it, you're participating.' Perhaps for this reason, she doesn't much enjoy watching films on television, except for reference, and has not acquired a video recorder. But she makes the point that filmgoers and critics with these aids, and with the NFT and its offshoots, forget how difficult it was when she began (and indeed on into the 50s) to catch up with films missed, or to fill in the historical gaps. She was one of the organisers of a notable effort at gap-filling, when she joined Olwen Vaughan and others in setting up the New London Film Society after the war. She was also, though not one of the globetrotting school of critics, in at the start of the Cannes festival in 1946.

Basically she remains what she began as: a weekly reviewer, a professional, a stylist, an enthusiast. She has enjoyed it, and agrees that perhaps her generation had the best of it. Formerly, she made it a point to keep her distance from film-makers, actors and actresses in particular. 'If you know someone, it's awfully difficult to say they acted like a starfish.' Now, however, she has relented somewhat. As for the film press, on the whole she has found them a most congenial crew. We agree. Watches are consulted and we hasten down Greek Street to see this most loved member of her profession into a taxi, on her way to deliver her weekly copy to *Punch*.

PH/JP

Thames Silents

Thames and Channel 4 plan to give silent films back to a long-lost popular audience

After the extraordinary success of *Napoleon* and *The Crowd*, Thames Television has taken the step we all hoped it would and instituted similar screenings on a regular basis. Each year, as part of the London Film Festival, Thames will present silent films accompanied by a live orchestra. The event will be known as Thames Television Season of Silent Films with Orchestra—or Thames Silents for short. Already it is expanding. This year there will be screenings of two films which neatly complement each other: Clarence Brown's hot-house romance *Flesh and the Devil* (1926), with Garbo and Gilbert, and King Vidor's comedy about picture-making in Hollywood, *Show People* (1928), with Marion Davies and William Haines.

Neither of these is a 'lost film' in the accepted sense; both have been shown at the NFT and both are preserved by MGM. But they



Dilys Powell. Photo: 'The Times'.



'Show People': Marion Davies in the studio canteen.

have been lost to the audience for which they were made. However respectfully revived, silent films have been condemned to the most meagre kind of presentation. Financial restrictions have led to bad prints, often shown without any sort of musical accompaniment. Thames Silents is extending the films' appeal beyond the devotees to that long-lost audience of ordinary cinemagoers—and reactions last year to *The Crowd* showed that the audience can be reached. The intention is to present films of the silent era as they were meant to be seen in first-run theatres—with top quality prints, shown at the right speed, with full orchestral accompaniment. (For *Flesh and the Devil* there will be 60 musicians in the pit, involving costs which could not be considered without Thames' commitment.) With due respect to Channel 4, which will eventually show all the films included in Thames Silents, and without whom the event would not be possible, the films were designed for big screens, large theatres and equally large audiences.

David Gill is the driving force behind the event; he works in close collaboration with Carl Davis, composer and conductor. The season is being established with MGM films because MGM have been notably co-operative and Channel 4 has contracted for six in a series of ten. But Thames will extend the range. All we need, after all, is the co-operation of the other major companies. Unfortunately several, which might have benefited most, allowed their silent films to be destroyed years ago. One estimate puts the destruction rate—intentional and otherwise—as high as two-thirds for the output of all American companies in the silent era. The situation in Europe is not much better. Pathé and Gaumont have many original negatives, but they refuse to make safety prints unless someone else carries the cost. This is where Thames Silents will make an increasingly

valuable contribution. But it will be a slow business, rescuing films, and companies would be well advised to invest in archive work now, before chemical deterioration takes further toll.

Thames' commitment is remarkable, for one hardly expects a commercial company to become involved with what, at first sight, seems such an uncommercial project. But the success of the shows, and that of *Napoleon* in Europe and America, is already having its effect. D. W. Griffith's *Intolerance* was shown at Cannes—although, sadly, plans for an orchestra collapsed at the last minute. Fairbanks and Valentino films are being roadshown in the United States with full orchestral accompaniment. And even an archive, George Eastman House, has been touring some of its rare films with 15 travelling musicians.

KEVIN BROWNLOW

Continuity

Among Jane Buck's credits were 'Private's Progress' (1955), 'The Knack' (1963), 'Georgie Girl' (1966) and 'The Europeans' (1979)

The British film industry lost one of its most skilled technicians in June when Jane Buck, keeper of continuity for more than 75 British features, died in London of cancer. She first fell ill in New York two years ago, but such was her pleasure in her work, and her commitment to it, that she went on to finish more films, including *Quartet* and *Chariots of Fire*. She was on her way back from India to begin Bill Forsyth's new film when she collapsed and went into hospital, where she lay fretting and indignant that she was unable to join her unit in Scotland.

Probably many readers of this magazine, like most members of the cinema-going public, don't know what the continuity girl—she's also called the script girl and the script supervisor—actually

does, or how important she can be to a production, or that her efforts can later on affect the editing of a picture in something of the same way, say, that a court stenographer affects the outcome of a trial. There are continuity girls who define their duties narrowly, sometimes through choice and sometimes because the director likes it that way. Basic duties are making a record of each shot, writing down what happens on the continuity sheets, noting the action and dialogue, the lens used, the time the shot takes, and leaving it at that, but speaking up when it looks as if a mechanical error is about to be made by an actor, who may take off his glasses or light a cigarette at the wrong moment in subsequent takes or another angle during a scene to create an awkward cut.

Jane Buck interpreted her duties in a larger way, going beyond record keeping. She often became an extension of the director, as the cameraman and editor do, and when my tired brain began to short-circuit, she would be there plucking at my sleeve with urgent reminders about lines of dialogue which may have seemed destined, in the rush to complete a scene, to be scrappily covered or even forgotten altogether. In those inevitable left-right disputes that arise between director and cameraman over whether an actor should look camera right or left, she would step briskly in, chin tilted and mouth set in what seems to me a very English way, and avert muddle. She didn't care whom she had to straighten out, hissing 'No!' from her corner. Her displeasure when an actor repeatedly forgot his lines could be grimly visible, yet she was extremely generous towards actors, living their performances with them from her privileged position next to the camera, and when I forgot to express my appreciation of these performances or she considered it perfunctory, would push me up to the actors after the definitive take, saying 'Tell them!'

She hated time-wasting on the set even more than the producer, and muttered 'What is this farago?' when rehearsals led away from, not towards, a scene's first take. In the morning, if she thought we were carrying on as though we had several more hours at our disposal than there were in a day's schedule, and she sensed a too relaxed and unproductive mood, she used to march up and ask in her bright, cheerful little voice, 'Shall we have a line-up?' This used to annoy me, I must admit, and when I fobbed her off with some lame excuse, citing delays amongst the hairdressers and make-up artists, she would give me the sort of sharp, but not unkind, look that a disappointed teacher fixes on a procrastinating pupil. Between shots, while the lighting was going on, she set up

somewhere with her portable typewriter and typed out the next continuity sheets from the shorthand notes she'd just made during the previously completed scene. This created a brisk, businesslike atmosphere on the set during those sluggish interludes of track laying and light manipulation; perched there, she reminded me a bit of a perky, chirpy canary bird.

Her continuity sheets are much more than the scene-by-scene record of how a film is shot. They



Jane Buck during the 'Quartet' shooting. Photo: Pierre Lhomme.

were her form of written self-expression, a kind of journal of moments and minutes of a film being photographed in which she could comment wittily, though discreetly. When she didn't like a scene, she gave a brief matter-of-fact description and moved on to one she liked. These she entered into with great enjoyment, so that it was as if she was describing delightful events she'd just witnessed for a friend not lucky enough to have been there. A little scene she liked from *Heat and Dust* was Slate No 409, shot in Hyderabad on 26 March. There were six takes, of which only the last one was printed; the Begum is played by Madhur Jaffrey:

'CU. The BEGUM, like thunder. She shuffles the cards below frame. BEGUM: "Vohee Firrungi Churail Hai—Oleewa." [There's that foreign devil—Olivia.] She shoots dirty looks at the two older princesses and deals cards like pins into a wax image.'

We would find these kind of notes from Jane months later in the editing room when we were looking for takes, and they would make us laugh, as we are doing now, for the last time, sadly.

JAMES IVORY

IN THE PICTURE

Taormina

A second successful year showcasing first and second features

Taormina has been notable in recent years for the British films screened in competition. *Gregory's Girl* and *Radio On* both played to acclaim, the latter being awarded the Special Jury prize in 1980. This year's festival was no exception. Channel 4's *Remembrance*, directed by Colin Gregg, in fact went a stage further by winning the Grand Prize, an achievement highlighted by it being up against respectable if not startling competition.

Both the other main prize-winners, Peter Gothar's *Time Stands Still* (noted in SIGHT AND SOUND's Cannes report) and from Holland Marleen Gorris' *A Question of Silence* (*De Stilte rond Christine M.*), were thought-provoking, well-crafted and multi-layered works. Gorris' film, her first, went into production only after she could find no one else to direct her screenplay unchanged. Marleen Gorris had no previous film-making experience, her background had been in the amateur theatre, but her debut is marked by astonishingly confident camera movement and editing. The film is built around

the fictional court case of three women who beat to death a man, a boutique-owner who has attempted to stop one of them shoplifting, and is interspersed with increasingly revealing flashbacks of the unpremeditated crime. The thrust of the narrative is carried by the woman psychiatrist who is engaged to investigate their sanity; and her conclusion, that they are perfectly sane, not only rocks the male judiciary, but throws her own well-ordered life into confusion. Intelligent and occasionally very funny.

Another woman film-maker (Taormina has gained a reputation for encouraging women's films), Maria Luisa Bemberg, presented her *Señora de nadie* (Argentina), having fought for four years to have the script passed by the censor, who deemed it damaging to family life. The film charts the painful but rewarding transition to independence of a married woman who discovers her husband is unfaithful and its strength derives from the affecting central performance by Luisina Brando. Not a radical film by most standards, but its mere existence is a small triumph.

Of bizarre interest was the Spanish entry *Reborn* by Bigas Luna, which was filmed in English and featured Dennis Hopper as a maniacally over-the-top fake revivalist who has become

embroiled in the Second Coming. Beginning with promising restraint, with a fine balance between magic and miracles, the film inexorably gathers speed and finally plunges headlong into the fantastic. The principals, unfortunately, become increasingly cypher-like in their metamorphosis into Joseph and Mary II.

The Grey Fox (Canada), directed by Phillip Borsos, on the other hand was a reflective, measured—though occasionally overstretched—character study. The script was drawn from a true story and Richard Farnsworth's stately portrayal of a robber emerging from jail after thirty years to resume his trade along twentieth century lines (trains have replaced stagecoaches) won him the prize for best actor. The breathtaking scenic backgrounds, used to effect in this evocative reworking of an old story, helped Borsos to the main money prize and assured Italian distribution.

In 1981 Taormina showed Iceland's first feature; and this year came its second, *The Outlaw* (*Utlaginn*), also by Agust Gudmundsson, apparently Iceland's only active film-maker. A saga of blood feud and clannish revenge set in the early Middle Ages, this heroic tale seemed most reminiscent of a Saturday serial, paste props and all.

Britain's *Brimstone* and

Treacle, directed by Richard Loncraine and scripted by Dennis Potter after the BBC had rejected the original play for transmission, was notable for the performances of Denholm Elliott, Joan Plowright and Sting, although the film itself was somewhat coolly received. Subtitling did not do justice to the infected menace, in tone and idiosyncratic speech, of the young intruder, and to the peculiar bitchiness of the married couple. The Italians appeared to have difficulty placing it. *Remembrance* had no such problems, being seen in the context of British social realism as established by Ken Loach and others, and appreciated for its formal structure and controlled characterisations.

The customary last-night TV spectacular surrounding the awards ceremony was lent a touch of class with Tennessee Williams, pulled from his holiday solitude, being presented with the keys to the city. He dedicated the evening to Anna Magnani (tumultuous applause), but did not find the moment to mention that he was writing a play, *The Lingered Hour*, set in Taormina. It is about the destruction of the world when all the volcanoes simultaneously erupt. Just as well perhaps since Etna's smoke would not have made a comfortable background.

JO IMESON

All Singing

Jacques Demy returns to Nantes

Jacques Demy's new film, *Une Chambre en Ville*, is one of his oldest projects. In 1953-54, just out of film school, he began to write a novel set in his home town of Nantes, a tragic love story against a background of violent conflict in the shipyards of a kind which has been frequent in the town. 'I had done seven or eight chapters, and then I dropped it because I realised it wasn't a novel at all and that it would be better to make it into a film. I couldn't find the right ending; I couldn't work it out. Perhaps it was too close to me because in many ways it was my father's life, or attached to memories of things he had told me.' In 1964, after the success of *Lola* and *Les Parapluies de Cherbourg*, he mentioned his 'premier vrai scénario' in an interview with *Cahiers du Cinéma*. By that time, however, he was talking about 'doing an opera, an opera for an opera house', and the action had moved from Nantes to Saint-Nazaire.

Ten years later, Demy came back to the subject to give it its final form: a musical tragedy in which all dialogue would be sung,

as with *Les Parapluies de Cherbourg*. His old collaborator, Michel Legrand, did not like the script, and Demy turned to another composer, Michel Colombier, with whom he worked for a year on the project. In a 1976 interview Demy said: 'The music is pop and lyrical, very beautiful. The film opens during a strike, with a cordon of police in the Place de la Préfecture and the workers in the Rue du Roi Albert, all singing in chorus. Really very lyrical... Gérard Depardieu was to play Guilbaud, a workman who rents a room from an elderly Countess, a colonel's widow. Catherine Deneuve was Edith, the Countess' daughter, who is married to a bourgeois and prostitutes herself in the evenings, naked under her mink coat. She meets Guilbaud by chance and they fall madly in love; a total, guilty passion which leads to their deaths. Simone Signoret was to play the Countess, and Isabelle Huppert Guilbaud's fiancée.'

In spite of this casting, it had proved as difficult to find a producer as it had been with *Parapluies* ten years earlier. But Demy proceeded, thanks to a 50,000 franc 'avance sur recettes' grant, and in 1976 Gaumont and Planfilm finally agreed to produce the picture. Backing and distribution were assured, recordings started, and a shooting schedule was agreed. It had to be called off

when Catherine Deneuve, whose singing voice had been dubbed in *Parapluies*, as with all the other actors, refused to be dubbed on this occasion, arguing that her voice was an integral part of her artistic identity. Depardieu followed suit. The musical score was a very difficult one, the tests did not satisfy a demanding director, and both players eventually withdrew. Although efforts were made to go ahead, with Dominique Sanda replacing Deneuve and Danielle Darrieux taking the Signoret role, the impetus had been lost.

For the next two years, Demy struggled to set up an enormous Franco-Soviet co-production, a musical comedy called *Anouchka*. It failed because he was unable to find a producer willing to risk the modest French participation. Another plan, for a musical with Yves Montand and Isabelle Adjani, also fell through. During this time he did direct two commissioned works: *Lady Oscar* (1979), a big historical picture made in France but filmed in English for a Japanese producer, and *La Naissance du Jour* (1981), a sensitive adaptation of Colette's novel for French television.

Then, quite unexpectedly, at the end of 1981 Demy finally got his chance. At the insistence of Dominique Sanda, whom he had just directed in *La Naissance du Jour*, he was asked by the pro-

ducer Christine Gouze-Rénal to make a television film. Demy suggested instead that she should produce *Une Chambre en Ville*, and six years after its collapse the production was on again. Because of financial constraints, Demy had to agree to shoot all the interiors in a studio, something he had not done in France since making *Le Bel Indifférent* in 1957.

Back in the spring, I visited the set at the Billancourt studios. In a small corner of an immense stage, Bernard Evein, who has worked with Demy ever since they were at art school together in Nantes, had constructed the intricate set of a six-room apartment. Even when Demy works in a studio, he likes to find the familiar logic of places which really exist, and the set is so organised that the camera will be able to move easily from one room to another or glimpse what is happening through a half-open door at the end of a corridor. In Edith's bedroom, which is littered with sports magazines and bicycle wheels, there is an 18th century bust on the mantelpiece, Evein's familiar signature for any bourgeois interior he designs for Demy. This time it is irreverently topped with a cyclist's cap.

The film's soundtrack had been recorded six weeks before shooting started, and for some weeks the actors have been listening to a cassette recording to familiarise



'Une Chambre en Ville'. Top: Dominique Sanda, Danielle Darrieux, and one of Demy's many mirrors. Centre: Michel Piccoli, Jacques Demy, Danielle Darrieux. Bottom: the shipyard strikers in Nantes. Photographs: Moune Jamet.

themselves with rhythms and inflections they will have to respect scrupulously during the takes. The first scene is to be shot in the Countess' salon, a large, entirely red room, and brings together Darrieux and Richard Berry, a promising newcomer to French cinema, playing her lodger. Darrieux sings herself (as she did in *Les Demoiselles de Rochefort*), but it is the first day of filming and you can feel how tense she is at having to subordinate her acting to a tyrannical voice which will suffer no vagaries. After a few rehearsals the process becomes natural, and in the days that follow I see the actors forgetting after a few minutes that no one is recording the sounds they are producing, and playing as though the voices coming from the huge loudspeaker on the set were their own.

Demy is insistent that his camera's lens should never be in a position that would be physically impossible for a human observer. He is also concerned, as in all his films, with precise indications of time (the whole action takes place in forty-eight hours). As the crew moves from one room to another, the props man rushes ahead to set a drawing room or kitchen clock at the right time. It's also evident, from the first scene, that Demy will be showing his actors' reflections in mirrors whenever the sets and the action allow it.

Demy is quite happy to be shooting in a studio, with sets that can be planned in terms of camera angles and walls that can be moved at will, particularly since the film involves a limited number of places, with Darrieux's apartment and Michel Piccoli's television shop taking up more than half the shooting schedule. At the same time, he pays special attention to all the props which link the film with Nantes. Later in the schedule, the production moves to Nantes for location shooting—not in the 18th century part of the town where *Lola* was shot but in the 17th century quarter, where the buildings are more austere and more in keeping with this film's sombre tone. Michel Piccoli's shop, however, is in the Passage Pommeraye, where Roland Cassard met *Lola* more than twenty years ago.

There will also be three days in the Place de la Préfecture, filming fighting between police and strikers. About 800 extras are recruited locally for these scenes (many of them unemployed, since the region has been badly hit by the economic crisis), and local choirs have been enlisted to give conviction to the workers' song of hope and confidence amid the tear gas and the burning cars. Two decades after *Les Parapluies de Cherbourg*, Jacques Demy is facing the biggest challenge of a career which has never been characterised by caution.

JEAN-PIERRE BERTHOME

MERCHANT IVORY

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EUROPEAN PREMIERE IN LONDON EARLY DECEMBER

FROM KING

SIGHT AND SOUND is a wonderfully dating title for a film magazine. It's a name shared with other organisations perhaps of more recent vintage, notably a typing school and a firm which rents out binoculars to racegoers. In a film context, however, it could only belong to those very few years when sound itself was something to shout about. An editor who inherited the title, perhaps looking rather wistfully at *Movie* and *Screen and Stills*, the single words sitting more gracefully on the tongue and on the title page, can still be grateful, all things considered, that the founders didn't get entirely carried away and call it *Talkie*.

The magazine owed its existence to a committee, the Commission on Educational and Cultural Films, whose deliberations resulted in the launching of SIGHT AND SOUND in 1932 as a preliminary to the setting up of the British Film Institute the following year. These beginnings, however shrouded in bureaucracy, don't quite fit an image of stubborn and continuing British official philistinism about film. After all, France in the 1930s acquired the all-important archive but not the rest of that package of all-sorts which made up, and still makes up, the BFI. The American Film Institute, for its part, was not founded until many years after the Second World War.

I have always assumed, without digging too much into the evidence, that the attitudes which allowed SIGHT AND SOUND and the BFI to spring full grown from the brow of a committee had a good deal in common with those which informed other characteristic institutions of the day: anything from the Reithian BBC to the documentary film movement, from Penguin Books to the conscious emphasis on 'good design' which followed the 1931 Gorrell Report. They seem united in a sense both of wariness and opportunity about the mass media and the changing environment. They shared a trust that if the 'best' (an unquestioned kind of best: classical music and the famous first ten titles from Penguin and McKnight Kauffer posters) were made available to people at prices they could readily afford, they would seize the chances offered and thereby join a general process of cultural betterment. During the war, this did more or less happen. And the 1951 Festival of Britain was possibly a final fling for attitudes which ran through the previous quarter of a century.

When the BFI was founded, it was written into its constitution that it should not concern itself with the affairs

of the film industry or with censorship. Such prohibitions obviously reflected film trade fears about a busy-bodying, do-gooding type of organisation devoted to something called 'the art of the film'. In fact, the twain showed little signs at that time of ever meeting. There were perpetual reminders, current right up to the 50s, that film was 'both art and commerce', the implication being that the two might somehow be kept separate and that if the film societies and the magazines and the cultural committees did their job, art would prevail. One has not heard for years this sanctified phrase about 'art and commerce', on a par with the other great duo 'form and content'; one has not for that matter heard much lately about the 'art of the film'. Attitudes of the 30s tend to survive among politicians, businessmen and others, who probably acquired them at school and have not had much occasion to think about such questions since. For practitioners, things have become harder, tougher, less clear-cut.

In its early days, SIGHT AND SOUND carried a number of articles about how to set up a projector in a classroom, and what to show on it when you had done so; it also published pieces by Grierson, Rotha, Lejeune, and occasionally by writers then active in the field but long since lost to it, such as Alistair Cooke and Graham Greene. This slightly schizophrenic effect seems typical of the time. Grierson believed profoundly in the audience that existed outside the cinemas. Critics of the day—Grierson most notably, but also Greene and later Winnington and others—were concerned with trying to rouse the movies to an awareness of their potential. What that potential was reckoned to be might vary according to the observer, but it usually implied some link between 'realism', use of the medium's observational powers, and the betterment of society.

Not much seems to have changed between the early 30s and the late 40s, from which my own experience dates. At that time, there were certain very marked critical attitudes, so general that they run like the lettering in rock through, for instance, the issues of the *Penguin Film Review*. (The publication a few years ago of the complete run of the *Review* was like opening an old box still haunted by a scent not encountered for years.) Hollywood was rather profoundly distrusted,

for vulgarity, raucousness, encouragement of standards solely determined by money, and so on. British films were widely regarded as more intelligent, more mature, more in touch with the real life of the people; and not without some reason, since the years of *A Matter of Life and Death* and *Fires Were Started*, of *Brief Encounter* and *Kind Hearts and Coronets* and *The Third Man*, remain the *anni mirabili* of British cinema. Hitchcock, then going through a series of heavy movies like *The Paradine Case* and *Rope*, was still thought of as a British film-maker who had made off, like others, 'for the duration', but might yet be reminded where his duty lay.

There was—and to some extent still is—a critical morality which argued that small films were more honourable than large ones, and films made outside studios were to be taken more seriously than the products of 'studio artifice'. Neo-realism was so widely acclaimed partly because it was at the opposite extreme from Hollywood. Zavattini's comment about the film he could make about a woman buying a pair of shoes was welcomed. This was the way cinema could go (it did: into first the innovations and then the clichés of *cinéma vérité*). At the same time, every critic worth his salt was profoundly Francophile, even if this meant admiring the fatalistic, luxuriant, far from realistic romantic melancholy of Carné and Prévert. Above all, everyone thought that the cinema would go on for ever. Everyone went to the cinema, the pictures, even still the 'flicks', and as far as our generation was concerned, always had done so and always would.

In another article in this issue, Gilbert Adair mentions Paul Rotha's *The Film Till Now* as the bible of a generation. In the late 40s Rotha's book was perhaps between editions, certainly not available in paperback, and the key book, virtually the only one both accessible and affordable, was Roger Manvell's sturdy little Pelican, *Film*. Manvell's book included a list headed 'Fifty Years of Films', and juvenile critics, not too sure about where they might be going, felt that if they tried to catch up with those titles they must at least be on the right track. In fact, the Manvell list is instructive, typical of the attitude of the day, in its bias towards European cinema (the Orient was of course still unknown territory)

KONG

and rather sparse representation of Hollywood. The 1950 edition, for instance, lists fourteen films by Anthony Asquith, ten by Blasetti, eleven by Duviour; only four by Cukor, three by Hawks, one by Minnelli.

Not surprisingly, new British film critics have tended to rediscover America. There has perhaps been a slight sense of grievance, that mentors who had introduced them to the Art of the Film, which usually involved sitting on exceedingly hard seats watching the more remorselessly glum Swedish silent classics, had not indicated that the process could be in any way entertaining. *Sequence* wrote about Ford's Westerns and Minnelli's musicals; *Movie* about Preminger's melodramas and Minnelli's non-musicals. Later generations have followed up, but the job had been well and truly done: everyone has now rediscovered Hollywood.

It has seemed worth talking about these attitudes of thirty-odd years ago because they appear so remote, common-places having to be recalled by a conscious effort. Elsewhere in this issue, Gilbert Adair analyses the way film criticism has been, and is, practised in Britain, and Denis Forman discusses changes in the style and habits of viewing images on screens during the fifty years of this magazine's lifetime. I don't propose to cover the same ground here. In the context of SIGHT AND SOUND's fiftieth anniversary, however, one should note the debt the magazine owes to Denis Forman. When he became director of the BFI in 1949, he took a then somewhat moribund journal by the scruff of its neck and shook it into life, largely by appointing my predecessor, Gavin Lambert, as editor. (He also somehow grabbed one of the Festival of Britain's temporary structures as the first National Film Theatre, thereby creating a whole new style of filmgoing.) Denis Forman wanted SIGHT AND SOUND to broaden its circulation, which it did: from 10,000 copies or so in the early 50s, to some 32,000 a decade ago, and currently back to a little under 30,000.

As British cinema attendances continue their dive towards the floorboards, film magazines inevitably have trouble building or holding circulation. Increased interest among a minority, stimulated by the educational activity of the last few decades, is all very fine; but it's not a true substitute for the widespread general interest of the mass audience days. More people are probably now seeing more films than ever before, via TV and

video, but in a curious way people don't seem quite to realise this, still perhaps thinking of 'films' as things that go on in cinemas. Critics, for that matter, can feel the same way. We publish in this issue the latest of our 'Top Ten' polls, revealing an astonishingly conservative pattern of voting. When we wrote to the critics, we suggested that one criterion might be that the ten films could form the basis of a cassette collection. Several people wrote back sharply that they had no intention of demeaning films to video: the big screen's still the thing.

In one of his essays, René Clair speculated intriguingly about what might have happened if technology had allowed television to come *first*—if the progress had not been inwards, towards the small, house-trained screen, the informational service, the medium that reaches its height in reporting the news, but outwards, towards the imaginative freedom of the cinema screen. Would there have been a sense of liberation? On the whole, however, cinemas are simply becoming too expensive to maintain—like the ocean liners they used to resemble, when the fleets of Odeons were moored on the approach roads to London. The current sharp decline in cinema attendance is a British rather than an international phenomenon, and has been variously blamed on the weather, the Falklands, the recession, a run of dull Hollywood movies, or the fact that since Britain leads the world in the purchase of video recorders, it naturally follows that these will be used at the expense of the sale of cinema tickets.

The technological changes do not necessarily mean, of course, that more people will be watching more things. Given the number of hours of television already being viewed, that's hardly on

the cards. In effect, change is rather more a matter of swings and roundabouts: if people are watching last week's TV serial or last year's Hollywood blockbuster on video, then the losers are other television programmes or the new cinema releases. Also, as Brian Winston forcefully pointed out in our last issue, this is one of the areas in which more probably means worse: the 'television of abundance' becomes the television of impoverishment, sustained by endless repeats of films and programmes which should be put out of their misery and sent to the knacker's yard.

What happens after the great leap forward (video, cable, DBS, laser disc, etc) expected in the next few years? The next stage will probably be large screens in the home, showing work in whose construction computers may have played a sizeable part, and no doubt some sort of three-dimensional holograms. And by that time, if the cable prophets win the day, we will be spending a good deal of time interacting with, or talking back to, the television screen, whose new role seems at times to be envisaged as rather like that of the dog Nana in *Peter Pan*. If all this were to happen, it even seems remotely possible that people might be brought back to cinemas—if any still exist—as a way of escaping the barrage of information and surveillance from their television screens. Already, one notes that in any setting where closed circuit television is much in evidence, one finds oneself trying not to let the screens catch one's eye. Cinema has represented choice; video is becoming background, like the music they play in lifts.

I am also indebted to Brian Winston for the notion that change is largely in the eye of the technological beholder. If you set a time traveller from the 19th century down in front of a 1982 television set, after a few slight awkwardnesses with the form there would be no difficulty at all in recognising what was happening: the story, the drama, the quiz game, the musical entertainment, even, however baffling, the news. (The commercials, however, might be hard to fathom.) The fifty years since the foundation of this magazine have seen the spread of sound, colour, wide screen, a little 3-D, new kinds of cameras and sound equipment, black and white television, colour television, satellite broadcasting, teletext, video. Or, to put it another way, we have travelled from *King Kong* to *E.T.: the Extra-terrestrial*. Perhaps that may also begin to put the next fifty years in perspective. Or perhaps not. ■

TO E.T.

DENIS FORMAN



My life and

Sir Denis Forman is Chairman of Granada Television and was director of the British Film Institute from 1949 to 1955, key years in the development of SIGHT AND SOUND

1932

On 12 May 1932, the year SIGHT AND SOUND was born, an important announcement was made outside the Baths Hall, Moffat (population 2,500). 'Tonight at 8 pm: All Talking Programme includes *The Lottery Bride*—Jeanette MacDonald, Joe E. Brown, John Garrick: Don't miss the thrilling scenes where the airship crashes into the Arctic! Also News, Interest Film, Sound Cartoon and Comedy. Prices: 1s 6d and 1s 2d. Youths 18 and under 9d. Children 4d. Coming next week: *Hell's Angels* with Ben Lyon, Jean Harlow.'

The silent era was over, even in Moffat. For over a decade, three times a week on Monday, Wednesday and Saturday, we had trooped into the Baths Hall to see Chaplin, Keaton, Harold Lloyd, Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford, or indeed any film the local operator judged to be cheap enough to give him a margin and powerful enough to hold the attention of the audience. Conditions were hardly those in which the same films are shown today at the National Film Theatre. There was only one projector and as each

reel ended the house would break into pandemonium. It was the convention for youths and girls not joined in wedlock to sit apart, girls on the right, boys on the left, and the latter would use the intervals to whistle, flip toffee lumps into the girls' hair, bang the wooden forms on the floor, discreetly simulate the act of copulation, and generally engage in a display of virility until the picture started again. If it were a strong one there would be instant silence, but if it was weak the whistling and cat-calling would sometimes gather momentum until the operator was obliged to appeal for quiet. The next stage was a visit from Police Sergeant Graham, and on at least one occasion the film (title, alas, forgotten) was stopped before it had completed the course. There was a rumour that once they had tried a pianist, but he had been taken off to the cottage hospital after the second reel change to have four stitches in the back of his head.

This was the Art of the Film as I first encountered it. The sound era was not so glamorous. We lost the silent comedians and the beautiful, doe-eyed heroines, and what we had instead was a lot of talking in clipped American phrases in tones like those of a speak-your-weight machine. Very few of us could understand what was being said.

Films had been available at the Baths Hall from the dawn of memory, but in 1926 the medium of the future arrived—radio. Our house was the first in the parish to erect an aerial. Radio meant earphones, at the end of your lead there was a jackplug which you stuck into a six-way distribution box on the central table. This limited freedom of movement and reduced intercommunication to mime. Children's Hour was obligatory, like lessons, and we soon recognised that talking radio was an extension of parental authority. There was an admonitory air about the talking radio people: they were clearly out to improve us, and their attempts at child entertainment were quite horrible, especially Uncle Mac and the ritual reading of birthday names

punctuated by the coy coo-ee shout of 'Hello, twins'. We vowed that if ever we met a boy whose name had been read out on radio we would mark him for life.

So far as one can judge, wireless and the pictures were a net addition to the experience that life offered in Moffat and in our adjacent village of Beattock. They did not put into eclipse any folk art or home entertainment, because there was very little of that sort of thing going on. The few men who fiddled continued to fiddle, and just as badly as before, but perhaps with a tune or two pulled out of the air; the ploughing matches, sheepdog trials, agricultural shows, the curling and the socials continued just as before. Books were not abandoned because despite Kailyard propaganda spread by J. M. Barrie and others, there never had been any. A 'book' meant *Tit-Bits* or occasionally Annie S. Swan: once read they were not preserved in shelves but put to a more immediate use in the outdoor john. Perhaps it was only the gramophone that suffered from the radio invasion, and this was no great loss. Records were expensive (4s 6d for an HMV 12" plum label, 2s 6d for a 10") and the few gramophone owners had a limited stock mainly of entertainers such as Harry Lauder, Will Fyffe, Frank Crumit, one or two military and pipe band records, and hymns. Jazz, classical and even Ambrose and Henry Hall were strictly for the middle classes.

The talking radio persons' appetite for lecturing us was by no means satisfied by Children's Hour and programmes for schools. They continued with an endless stream of information right into the evening. The National Programme in the last week of May 1932 carried in peak time, for instance, 'The Rungs of the Ladder, II', the Rt Hon Eric Geddes PC, GCB, who could 'look back on an exceptionally long ladder successfully scaled ... and now directs the destinies of the Dunlop Rubber Company and Imperial Airways'; 'Life Among the Native Tribes, II, The Rhodesian Native in his Home', by Audrey Richards; 'Speech in the Mod-

ern World, 11', Speech Structure by Mr A. Lloyd Jones; 'The Road to the West', being the audible meditation of a traveller by road from London to Land's End; 'Reparation and the Lausanne Conference' by Sir Andrew McFadyen. All these were top people, reflecting the views held by top people and, therefore, naturally the right sort of thing to broadcast.

But music—this was different: here the radio brought us the repertory of the day in astonishing profusion. In that same summer week of 1932 there were three relays from Covent Garden, with Sir

Thomas Beecham conducting the first act of *Meistersinger* and of *Tannhäuser* and the third act of *Götterdämmerung*, a new operetta by Walter Leigh, four concerts by the BBC Symphony Orchestra, a recital by Rudolph Dolmetsch, innumerable concerts of Light Music and Dance Music from Henry Hall and Ambrose. Drama was less prominent, only one play in that week, a glittering *Hamlet* produced by Val Gielgud with John Gielgud, Martita Hunt, Margaretta Scott, Jack Hawkins, Robert Donat.

Here was a new way of passing the

time, and even though the Johnstones and the Jardines in Beattock village could make little of the strange alien culture that poured out of the air, by 1932 amongst the 80,000 or so inhabitants of Dumfriesshire, 4,000, or one in twenty, held a ten shilling radio licence, a surprisingly high ratio when one reflects that throughout the 30s a man had to support a family on an agricultural wage of some thirty shillings a week.

The wireless and the pictures had undoubtedly become an important part

TV times...

Right: Denis Forman at BFI summer school with Orson Welles, 1953.

Below: opening nights. 1936: crew and performers on BBC Television's first magazine programme; 1955: camera moving in on ITV's opening ceremony at the Guildhall. Below right: Alexandra Palace.



of life. The two had no common ground with each other nor with the reality of living our own lives. The novels of Jane Austen were as near, perhaps, a little nearer, to our experience than the films of Mary Pickford or the talks by men who controlled the destinies of the Dunlop Rubber Company. The Keystone Cops were quite unlike the Dumfriesshire Constabulary, and whereas Lillian Gish was undoubtedly a girl, we knew we were unlikely to meet her sort at a Lockerbie dance or even in the Havana in Princes Street. It was not so much that the new forms were escapist (a word that was soon to be fashionably applied to the popular media), it was that they were separatist, they resided in distinct compartments of the mind, each its own Brobdingnag or Lilliput.

Meanwhile in the far-off south a little-known experiment was under way which was to detonate an explosion some twenty-five years later with shattering effect on both the pictures and the wire- less. At 11.30 am daily there was a half-hour television transmission on the Baird system (3.56 metres vision, 261.3 metres sound) and on Wednesday, 1 June, the Derby was televised from the course to the Metropole Cinema, Victoria, on a screen measuring five feet by six.

1957

When the British Film Institute, publisher of SIGHT and SOUND, reached its quarter century, I had recently left its staff to join Granada Television. Television was the medium of the future, everyone said so, but there was still quite a lot of the cinema left, in fact just over 4,000 cinemas serving a total of some 955 million paying clients per annum, an average of almost one visit every three weeks for every man, woman and child in the UK. This was a marginally greater number of admissions than in 1932, although the number of cinemas had fallen by some six hundred, mainly due to the closure of smaller houses in the regions. The Baths Hall, Moffat, struggled on showing rather dim double bills three times a week. The trade in general had, however, been worried about the decline in attendance since the great years that followed the war and they set on foot a series of 'Let's Go To The Pictures' campaigns, and watched apprehensively the rise of their potential destroyer.

The daily half-hour television transmissions of 1932 had become in 1936 a public service offering several hours of television every night. Until television closed down for the duration in 1939 it was still seen as an engineers' phenomenon and not a serious threat to the cinema, or indeed to any other medium. It was this period that gave us the oldest of all television chestnuts:

Media Costs

	ACTUAL			AT 1982 PRICES*		
	1932	1957	1982	1932	1957	1982
Average cinema seat	1s	2s	1.41	0.90	0.66	1.41
Radio licence	10s	£1	—	9.00	6.60	—
TV licence	—	£3	46.00	—	19.90	46.00
45 minutes recorded music (top end)	£1.10s	£2	5.50	26.85	13.25	5.50
The Times	2d	4d	20p	0.15	0.11	0.20

*assuming £1 in 1932 = £2.70 in 1957 and £17.90 in 1982

First Engineer: 'Did you watch tonight?'
Second Engineer: 'Yes. What did you think of it?'

First Engineer: 'Perfect saw-tooth and tone until the programme started but then a little cyclical distort.'

The service returned in 1946 and unlike television in the United States, which was spreading like a forest fire, its progress was painfully slow. The service reached Birmingham in 1949 and Manchester in 1951, and yet by 1952 there were less than a million and a half television licences whereas radio accounted for over eleven million. Indeed in the eyes of the BBC establishment radio was still the thing, and it was for this reason that Norman Collins, having failed in a long and arduous campaign to get adequate resources, resigned as Head of Television and set to work to bring to an end the BBC monopoly. How he succeeded, with the aid of the manufacturers and some strong support in the Conservative Party, is now written in the history books.

Independent Television went on the air in London at the end of 1955. By the summer of 1957 it covered over 85 per cent of the country. What happened? At the BBC, at first, very little. The *Radio Times* for 2 June 1957 devotes 28 pages to radio and half that number to television. There is an echo of the old talking radio style in the way the programmes are presented: *Panorama*—Richard Dimbleby opens Television's Window on the World; *Mainly for Women*—*A Woman's Work*—women from the Midlands with interesting and unusual jobs; *Quick and Easy Dressmaking*, a second showing of the film demonstrating the beach outfit (summer skirt and panties). There is also, however, top line sport, drama—good of its kind in its day—variety, some decently restrained American game shows and situation comedies. Meanwhile ITV was riding on a regular 70/30 audience ratio, with *Sunday Night at the London Palladium*, *Jack Jackson* and *Armchair Theatre* sweeping the board on Sunday, *Emergency Ward 10* and *Gunlaw* on Monday, *Television Playhouse* on Tuesday, *Double Your Money* and *Play of the Week* on Wednesday, *Spot the Tune* and a feature film on Thursday, *Take Your Pick* and *Dragnet* on Friday, another Western and *The Saturday Spectacular* to finish the week.

Looking back on those 1957 ITV schedules we can see that, although they attracted the viewers, television had not yet become *sui generis*. The plays came from the theatre, the variety from the music hall, American imports were made in the footprints of the Hollywood

Western (*Wagon Train*, *Wyatt Earp*) or the Warner Brothers thrillers (*Naked City*, *Dragnet*). American comedy derived from film comedy, most British comedy from the theatre of Aunt Edna or the films of Will Hay. News was a hybrid between radio (a man talking to camera) and newsreel (short filmed featurettes). Indeed only recently had the BBC ceased billing the news as News and Newsreel. There were, perhaps, two types of show indigenous to television. First there was the quiz game (*Double Your Money*, *Take Your Pick*) in which a showman drove quiz-persons into a state of frantic excitement at the prospect of winning an electric mincer or, more occasionally, money. One or two such shows, the hardy dinosaurs of television, still live on. The other class included current affairs programmes such as *Panorama*, *This Week*, *Free Speech*, *Under Fire*, *What the Papers Say*. These were not Talks in the radio sense but reviews of some part of the world scene. Their currency was real people, real problems, real news.

Politics, too, reached television for the first time in 1957. Previously the BBC had abstained from reporting elections on the grounds 'that we do not influence voters nor report the campaigns in news bulletins.' Granada, however, decided to test the legal and political ground by covering the Rochdale by-election in which Jack McCann (Labour) defeated TV newscaster Ludovic Kennedy (Liberal) and John Parkinson (Conservative). From this small beginning grew the whole new industry of tele-politics. This was not much noticed, however, by important people outside politics because, although the BBC at least were offering a number of superior programmes, television had not yet penetrated the upper middle classes. But some people would now admit to the ownership of a set 'for Nanny' and a surprising number appeared to find a way of seeing the Boat Race and Wimbledon.

Sir Robert Fraser, then the Director-General of the Independent Television Authority, liked to call ITV 'the people's television' to distinguish it from the BBC, which he saw perhaps as the top persons' television. In truth what difference there was between them, and it was not very great, lay in the fact that ITV was run by showmen and the BBC by broadcasters who had learned their trade in radio, and not the razzmatazz of American radio but in a serious radio service that still stood by the Third Programme and employed a Director of the Spoken Word. This difference is reflected in another way, in the growth of the viewing public from

one and a half million in 1952 (BBC alone) to seven million in 1957 (BBC and 85 per cent ITV) and five years later when the ITV system was virtually complete—nearly twelve million.

Long before the arrival of popular television both radio and films had emerged from their separatist boxes and moved several degrees nearer to real life. Most of us—myself included—had never seen the Russian classics nor the British documentaries until the war forced this class of film upon our attention. Here was film being employed in an entirely new role. At the same time in features such as Ealing's *The Foreman Went to France* and Humphrey Jennings' *Fires Were Started* we saw people who were quite like us—people who shared our hopes, our fears, our lives, and there they were on the screen, of all places. This was where we used to see Mary Pickford and more recently Garbo and James Cagney. Similarly, talking radio came out of its far-away studios with their faint aroma of Bloomsbury, Hampstead and the Church of England, and became the central reference point for true news in a frightened world.

Until the run-up to the war, the only occasion upon which I can remember people hanging on radio's every word was at the death of George V, to most people a symbol of monarchy rather than a known King, and as we were told that his life was peacefully drawing to a close, I remember speculating that the whole event might well be part of a national tableau contrived by the talking radio people for the edification of the populace. But now in the war we listened to news nightly, sometimes hourly, not only reported news but news from reporters actually in the thick of what preoccupied us all—the war itself. If Stuart Hibberd and Alvar Lidell were the oracles, Ed Murrow and Wynford Vaughan-Thomas were our friends and comrades in arms. And it wasn't only news. Jack Priestley talked to us as if we were his equals, and in the same room. Other people discussed on radio things that we wanted to discuss. Although the phantoms of Bloomsbury had not all gone, radio had broken into reality. It also had ITMA. It was now an important, almost an essential, part of everyday life.

And by June 1957 television was clearly no longer the medium of the future but of the present. Radio went on, but the transistor had not yet arrived and the nation received the Home, the Light and the Third by means of a still bulky apparatus, even the portable being about the size of a briefcase. A great deal of the Home Service equated with what might go on BBC2 today. The Light had the Huggetts and Mrs Dale, which had huge fan followings, and a great deal of middle-of-the-road music. The Third rested its reputation upon lofty peaks—talks by Jean-Paul Sartre and Robert Graves, a study of the development of English Drama from 1580, Beowulf adapted for radio, and excellent music of all serious sorts. There were, alas, very few listeners. In the record business, 'Rock Around the Clock', EPs and LPs

had arrived but not yet stereo or cassettes; in publishing the trade was on the verge of the great paperback revolution; the Crazy Gang were doing capacity business at the Victoria Palace and the last edition of *Picture Post* was published. But all could now see that television was upon them.

1982

Twenty-five years on we can be sure of a few things. The cinema of Hollywood and the Odeon has gone. In 1981, cinema admissions were one-tenth of the 1957 figures, 90 million against 955 million. Less than an average of two attendances per head per year. The mighty Granada Tooting the year before it closed attracted fewer clients in one week than in its heyday it had entertained at a single performance. In 25 years the number of cinemas shrank from over 4,000 to 1,500, and many of these are now twins and triplets of modest capacity. The number of feature films produced in Britain was 154 in 1932, 129 in 1957 and 36 in 1981.

A big movie like *Jaws* can still make a fortune, a good, modest budget film like *Chariots of Fire* can do very well, but for the most part the cinema film business is becoming the hardback section of the video publishing trade. The cinema can offer a launching pad whence a film can gain impetus from publicity, reviews and box-office returns which will propel it into the multi-million dollar class when it comes to be sold to the television and cable networks. And in Europe a different kind of film has found a different kind of audience, that is the films of Fassbinder, Truffaut, Wajda and others whose work can have only limited success outside their own countries. As in the 16th and 17th centuries musicians and painters had a ready audience in every court who came to be called the 'amateurs', or lovers of the arts, today the European film-maker has an audience of 'amateurs' in specialised cinemas all over the continent.

Television has passed through a sea change. Two channels in 1957, four by the end of 1982. No longer is there any significant difference between BBC and ITV. Producers, directors and executives now move to and fro, if not with complete freedom, at least without the fear of instant excommunication. A great deal of television is indigenous. The weekly serials are creatures of television; also there are many original series like *Upstairs, Downstairs* or *A Family at War*. Few plays now come straight from stock. There are still some classics and some new stage plays, but these are outnumbered by original television plays. The purveyors of the last group are in a constant state of anxiety over the health of the single play, perhaps because in

contrast to the series, which usually carries with it some narrative power or some of the glamour of history or fiction, the single play is usually about the downside of real life. The contemporary television playwright is not yet, however, so alienated from the wide public as the contemporary composer or painter. It is a paradox of committed playwrighting that the more passionately a writer feels that he is the bearer of a universal truth, the more likely it is that his television audience will contract. There are, of course, notable exceptions, among them Trevor Griffiths and Dennis Potter.

There is a lot of grey in television. The output has increased by nearly 100 per cent since 1957 even before the arrival of the fourth channel, and not everything is pure gold. Sport will glitter sometimes: once in a while a football match will take fire, the character of a snooker player or show jumper will enlist our sympathy and we will tremble lest he fails. Current affairs are in the hands of professionals and we are a million miles away from the show-business hurly-burly of *Free Speech*, the bland personality cult of Dimbleby Senior's *Panorama*, the brash tabloid journalism of the early *World in Action* or the prim studio discussions of 1957 *This Week*. The usually flat surface of current affairs programming is sometimes broken, however, by a burst of passion, by a fresh perception, or by some quietly argued case that inches the mind away from one point of view towards another.

1982's overall champion must, however, be news. In 1957 there were between 15 and 25 minutes of news on each channel each day. If a special event were to squeeze the schedule the news would be the first to go. Today there is over an hour for news each day on both BBC and ITV and if a big story breaks anywhere in the world the mid-evening News will put the squeeze on the rest of the schedule and swell to 45 minutes or an hour. There is a great deal of comment on news and back-up. Radio is still quicker, newspapers give more background, but today over 70 per cent of the population give television as their main source of news.

The coverage of sport has improved with colour, the universal use of zoom lenses and the mobility of lightweight cameras. Comedy has found its own television forms in *Monty Python* and *Not The Nine O'Clock News*, but there is still a stodgy wedge of what is quaintly called Situation Comedy around which is not much more than the extended music hall sketch. This form only rises to the sublime when it (rarely) becomes a comedy of character as in *Fawlty Towers* and *Porridge*. The service to schools started by ITV in 1957 is now thoroughly efficient; children's programmes have long been emancipated from Uncle Mac, the BBC outgunning ITV markedly in this department; there are very few complaints about the advertisements, which are often very prettily made. A little of this huge output is excellent, some is tolerably good, a great deal plain dull, and all of it is thoroughly professional.

Already we are encountering the

advance guard of a whole host of new video things. The first arrival is the video recorder, which is used most frequently for time-shift, and time-shift means, in five cases out of six, the recording of a feature film or a sporting event. The penetration of video recorders in the United States is some 4 per cent of set owners. In Great Britain, despite our economic and employment problems, the penetration is 8 per cent, and rising fast. This is ahead of every country in the world, including Japan.

Britain's lead is sometimes rationalised by pointing out that in many parts of the United States twenty or more cable signals are available at any time, hence there is no demand for a storage machine. I prefer to believe the British are not only avid viewers of entertainment—after all, no other nation matched our frequency of cinema attendance at its zenith—but they are discriminating too, and if they are offered a machine that will select the best that is on offer and play it back to them at a time of their choosing, they will buy this machine as a priority rather than accept the *table d'hôte* offered nightly by the broadcasting managements. It is hard to say yet how the lending library trade in video will prosper, for the scene is obscured by piracy on a grand scale. Until the illicit tape mafia is corralled, we will not know whether we have a demand for the sale or rent of tapes of the World Cup, of *Top of the Pops* or of *Brideshead Revisited*. I guess the clientele will be modest in numbers, but steady, on the scale of a book club rather than of a public library.

It is even harder to assess the demand for disc, the Rolls-Royce of the video scene. It has been hovering in the wings for long enough and is unlikely to become a practical proposition in Britain before 1984. Aside from the video buffs and some specialists, I forecast no great eagerness (unless the price is very attractive) for a device with well-nigh perfect picture and stereo sound, but no capacity to record off-air.

The greater agent for change may be cable. The excitement in the air today has been aroused artificially; not by the broadcasters, not by the film and video producers, certainly not by the viewers, but by the technology trade, who once again see an opportunity to do themselves a bit of good and at the same time save the British economy by their endeavours. They have succeeded in enlisting the full-hearted support of at least one minister and perhaps of another who is very highly placed indeed. Cable in the UK may come off. On the other hand we may be witnessing a false pregnancy, or perhaps—heaven forbid—another potential Ground Nuts scheme, for the economics do not seem to make a lot of sense yet.

The scale of investment is huge, for the ultimate target is an inter-active cable system in a large number of homes which will revolutionise our domestic logistics. Not only would you get the news, weather or time and a multitude of information on a host of other topics, at the flick of a switch you would get your

bank statement, your grocery account or an illustrated seed catalogue. You could then talk back, reduce your overdraft, pay the grocery account, order the seeds. In order to finance this great leap forward in the art of living, you would have to pay heavily during an intermediate period when, in addition to the three (soon to be four) off-air channels, you might have ten, twenty, thirty or more channels offering you feature films, sport, pop music, health programmes, and so on; also perhaps a number of satellite channels from neighbouring foreigners with France and Germany in the van. Thus the wages earned by entertainment would pay the bill for the new technology. That is the strategy.

In effect cable might do for video what the pirates did for radio. In 1957 you will remember the prim arrangement of the three BBC radio services remained unruffled by any uncouth rivalry. Luxembourg, the old enemy, had made serious inroads into inferior classes of radio listeners to be sure, but by simply ignoring this fact the BBC preserved its radio dignity intact. But the pirates (coupled with the arrival of the tranny) were another thing altogether. We, highbrow and lowbrow alike, could not avoid noticing this new kind of radio—friendly, cheerful and riding with huge vitality on the rock waves of the 60s. Subsequently the BBC sensibly bowed to the inevitable, Local Independent Radio arrived, and today in most places you can hear people's radio as well as the still excellent music of Radio 3 and the thinking man's radio of Radio 4.

If the tide does flow for cable in this country, I believe we have nothing to fear and can look forward to quite a lot of fun. There will be a high volume of popular video coming down the wires, of course, much of it by satellite, and it may be of unregulated popularity; certainly it will include a lot of rubbish and a proportion of porn, softer or harder depending upon circumstance. I do not find this alarming because in my experience the viewer has always proved to be a more reliable judge than the censor or the public regulator of what is or is not acceptable in the theatre, the cinema, or in the home. The video set in the home can have a lock-off device for those who want to apply rules of family viewing on any specific channel. If the reader can be trusted with the full range of books that pass the test of legality, the viewer can surely be treated equally and not as a second-class person who requires special protection. Indeed they can be, and often are, the same person.

Experience of the cinema and television in Britain does not support the fear that Gresham's law will apply to video entertainment, nor is it true that the more down-market you go the more money you make. In films, the top twenty all-time box office winners include some of the best films ever made and not one title that has not got some real quality. *Coronation Street* is not top of the pops in television because it is down-market but because it is made with a great deal of loving care and attention. Even Fleet Street, where the high priests of down-

market reside, may learn something from the plight of certain popular dailies which in recent years have dived down-market until they bumped the bottom and which are in some distress, whereas the *Telegraph* is doing very nicely, thank you, and the high-thinking *Guardian* is increasing circulation in a satisfactory manner.

A gleam of hope can be seen as a result of the cable revolution which has already largely happened in the United States. This is the phenomenon of cable hunger for feature films. The limited reservoir of new cinema films (completed films shown in the cinemas but not yet sold to off-air television) is already exhausted and the best of the past has been used and re-used to the point of no return. Thus a new industry is springing up, to supply in large numbers TV movies of sufficient attraction to keep the clients paying the monthly rental for the film channel on cable. The term TV movies denotes little difference in technique from that of feature films, rather in budget. A TV movie might cost anything from one million to four million pounds. Some cinema features recently have been credited (or debited) with budgets of over thirty million dollars.

This may offer an opening for the British film industry which, unlike our Continental neighbours, has for so long defied the laws of arithmetic by attempting to compete in world markets without a home base large enough to cover even a fraction of the risk. Nor has it helped them to stand at the wailing wall of television crying for better treatment. Television can still pick and choose; cable has run out and must have more.

It is not only because I have read more scripts than books and spent a large part of my life in studios and cutting rooms that I have come to feel that video is a part of life, and life in most of its varieties is now pretty faithfully reflected on video. What we do in school, at home, in the country and at work, can all be seen on the small screen. I think back to Miss Hutchison, who retired some fifty years ago after long service in the Beattock post office and village shop. She had no radio, but the village presented her with a gramophone, an HMV table console and the complete Church of Scotland service on a set of records. So far as I know, she never bought any other record, but since she was too lame to get to the kirk, she played the service through from her gramophone every Sunday morning.

Today as I drive past Beattock on the A74 and see the aerials on each stone chimney stack, I think of the elderly Boas, Wilsons, Quigleys and Sloans of 1982 sitting alone in their living rooms with their colour television sets, perhaps with a VCR acquired as a retirement present, and as I reflect upon the scope and variety of the new world of video that is on call to them, I cannot help wondering whether I have not witnessed the greatest change for the better in the quality of their lives that has ever taken place within the span of one man's experience. ■

Congratulations Sight and Sound!

Artificial Eye

1982/3 releases

HERZOG'S

Fitzcarraldo

GODARD'S

Passion

ANTONIONI'S

Identification of a Woman

Wagner's Parsifal

HANS JURGEN SYBERBERG

WENDERS'

The State of Things

BERGMAN'S

Fanny and Alexander

BRESSON'S

L'Argent

FASSBINDER'S

Querelle

Artificial Eye Film Company Ltd.,

211 Camden High Street, London NW1 Tel. 01-267 6036



1952 1962 1972

Bicycle Thieves/De Sica	1949	25
City Lights/Chaplin	1930	19
The Gold Rush/Chaplin	1925	19
Battleship Potemkin/Eisenstein	1925	16
Louisiana Story/Flaherty	1947	12
Intolerance/Griffith	1916	12
Greed/von Stroheim	1924	11
Le Jour se Lève/Carné	1939	11
Passion of Joan of Arc/Dreyer	1928	11
Brief Encounter/Lean	1945	10
Le Million/Clair	1930	10
La Règle du Jeu/Renoir	1939	10

Citizen Kane/Welles	1941	22
L'Avventura/Antonioni	1960	20
La Règle du Jeu/Renoir	1939	19
Greed/von Stroheim	1924	17
Ugetsu Monogatari/Mizoguchi	1953	17
Battleship Potemkin/Eisenstein	1925	16
Bicycle Thieves/De Sica	1949	16
Ivan the Terrible/Eisenstein	1943-46	16
La Terra Trema/Visconti	1948	14
L'Atalante/Vigo	1933	13

Citizen Kane/Welles	1941	32
La Règle du Jeu/Renoir	1939	28
Battleship Potemkin/Eisenstein	1925	16
8½/Fellini	1963	15
L'Avventura/Antonioni	1960	12
Persona/Bergman	1967	12
Passion of Joan of Arc/Dreyer	1928	11
The General/Keaton	1926	10
The Magnificent Ambersons/ Welles	1942	10
Ugetsu Monogatari/Mizoguchi	1953	9
Wild Strawberries/Bergman	1957	9

This is the fourth time that SIGHT AND SOUND has invited critics to play the Top Ten game. The exercise began back in 1952, to complement a Brussels referendum among film-makers. Since then, the temptation to test the critical climate every ten years, to find out whether the old assumptions still hold and how great is the impact of new films and ideas, has so far proved irresistible.

In writing to ask critics for their votes, we suggested that 1982 might well turn out to be the final replay, on the eve of the onslaught by video, cable, satellite and laser disc. The idea has always been 'Top Ten' rather than 'Best'. We have asked as many critics as we could muster to name the films that have been for them the most relevant, stimulating or plainly enjoyable, their choices for a desert island or their first entries in a cassette collection. Personal choice, open to idiosyncrasy and the mood of the moment, is less daunting than some impossible objective assessment. But as the range of material steadily widens, along with changes in the methods of transmitting or distributing it, the whole exercise becomes increasingly difficult—even perhaps constricting. Apart from Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, whose list is

made up of short films, most critics hold to the orthodoxy of the theatrical fiction feature, no longer by any means the dominant form. We also seriously wondered whether any consensus view would emerge, given the range of approaches to film criticism currently being practised and the fact that to name merely a film and a director inevitably smacks of *auteurism*. Bob Baker of *Film Dope* suggested that we might find 247 titles fighting for first place; we would not ourselves have been surprised.

The range of titles that turn up in individual lists is probably greater than ever. But when the votes are totted up, it appears that astonishingly little has changed—a conclusion likely to depress some as much as it may reassure others. *Citizen Kane*, a narrow winner in 1962 and an outright winner in 1972, has pulled clean away from the field; *La Règle du Jeu* remains runner-up; *Battleship Potemkin* is still there. Even the newcomers to the top ten are very old stagers: *Seven Samurai*, now available in its splendid full-length version, *Singin' in the Rain*, which seems to have been with us for ever and perhaps stands up to repeated TV screenings better than some of its contemporaries, and two runners-up from 1972, *Vertigo* and *The Searchers*, whose elevation is unlikely to surprise anyone.

The most recent film is *8½*, made almost twenty years ago. Is this rather overwhelming vote for the past a sign that film criticism is becoming an ageing profession, which may be the case? Is it that movies are not what they used to be? Or that younger critics are less confident about their immediate enthusiasms than those of 1952, when a new film, *Bicycle Thieves*, came out on top, or 1962, when another new film, *L'Avventura*, was runner-up? Whatever the reason, the films and film-makers of the 1970s come out rather poorly, in individual lists as well as in the final count.

In 1972 we suggested that the exercise was not to be taken too seriously and that it would be rash to risk generalisations on the basis of shaky evidence. All the same, there are undoubted

pointers, such as a vote for Hitchcock which reflects the hard work of the Hitchcock critical industry in the last two decades. The big names of the 1960s—Antonioni and Bergman and Godard—were likely to lose ground, given the pendulum swing of fashion. In fact they have lost less than might have been expected, and Fellini stoutly holds his place. We also noted ten years ago that the 60s 'had produced nothing to equal in worldwide impact the effect of neo-realism in the 40s or of everything summed up in the phrase "new wave" at the end of the 50s. The discoveries of the past decade have been of the kind that split rather than unite critical opinion; and when the votes are added agreement settles on the proven masters.' That comment survives unchanged ten years later. And in 1992, if there should be another round of the game, we won't be at all surprised if the verdict is still *Citizen Kane* first, the rest nowhere.

As to some details of the poll, we invited critics to include films made for television or video, though not TV programmes as such (one TV series has been listed, by Ivor Montagu, and it would be churlish to banish it). We wanted to publish all the 122 lists we received, and to save space have taken a rather arbitrary line about identifying directors, doing so only when a title might seem obscure or unfamiliar or when there might be confusion over similar or identical titles or between different versions of a play or novel. Titles are given in the form in which they are most generally recognisable in Britain—with apologies to overseas readers.

Finally, we would like to thank all the critics who have sent us their lists and their comments (regretting that we have not space to publish more of the latter). An individual list sometimes signals its country of origin, more often not, and the film community remains genuinely and encouragingly international. The fact that Japanese critics admire Willi Forst, or that Finns vote for Ozu, might seem surprising if one were talking about the equivalent novels or plays or television programmes. With movies we take this sort of thing for granted.

TOP TEN 1982

TOP TEN

<i>Citizen Kane</i> /Welles	1941	45
<i>La Règle du Jeu</i> /Renoir	1939	31
<i>Seven Samurai</i> /Kurosawa	1954	15
<i>Singin' in the Rain</i> /Donen & Kelly	1952	15
<i>8½</i> /Fellini	1963	14
<i>Battleship Potemkin</i> /Eisenstein	1925	13
<i>L'Avventura</i> /Antonioni	1960	12
<i>The Magnificent Ambersons</i> /Welles	1942	12
<i>Vertigo</i> /Hitchcock	1958	12
<i>The General</i> /Keaton & Bruckman	1926	11
<i>The Searchers</i> /Ford	1956	11

RUNNERS-UP

<i>2001: A Space Odyssey</i> /Kubrick	1968	10
<i>Andrei Roublev</i> /Tarkovsky	1966	10
<i>Greedy</i> /von Stroheim	1924	9
<i>Jules et Jim</i> /Truffaut	1961	9
<i>The Third Man</i> /Reed	1949	9

DIRECTORS

Orson Welles	71
Jean Renoir	51
Charles Chaplin	37
John Ford	34
Luis Buñuel	33
Akira Kurosawa	33
Federico Fellini	32
Alfred Hitchcock	32
Jean-Luc Godard	30
Buster Keaton	30

Critics' Lists

B. ABDOU

Algeria *Les Deux Ecrans*

Another Way (Karoly Makk), Andrei Roublev, The Asphalt Jungle, Battleship Potemkin, Citizen Kane, Les Dupes (Tewfik Salahi), Et Le Caire Repond (Y. Chahine), Georgia's Friends (Penn), The Kid, Nah'la (Farouk Beloufa).

GILBERT ADAIR

UK

L'Argent (L'Herbier), Les Dames du Bois de Boulogne, Limelight, La Nuit du Carrefour (Renoir), Playtime, Sunrise, Le Testament d'Orphée, Trouble in Paradise, Vampyr, Vertigo.

LARS AHLANDER

Sweden *Chaplin*

Bicycle Thieves, Citizen Kane, 8½, Les Enfants du Paradis, La Règle du Jeu, Sayat Nova (Paradjianov), Seven Samurai, Stalker, Wild Strawberries, Zigeunerweisen (Seijun Suzuki).

NIGEL ANDREWS

UK *Financial Times*

Aguirre, Wrath of God, Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia (Peckinpah), Citizen Kane, Gertrud, Lola (Fassbinder), The Passenger (Antonioni), Persona, The Seventh Victim (Mark Robson), 2001: A Space Odyssey, Vertigo.

EDGAR ANSTEY

UK

Citizen Kane, Earth, Casablanca, The Cranes Are Flying, The Ghost That Never Returns, Song of Ceylon, In the Heat of the Night, Fires Were Started, Terminus (John Schlesinger).

MARTYN AUTY

UK *Time Out*

Kings of the Road, Mean Streets, Orphée, Our Hospitality, Pierrot le Fou, Phantom Lady, Psycho, Strike, Sunrise, Zorns Lemma (Hollis Frampton).

BOB BAKER

UK *Film Dope*

A Day Out (Stephen Frears: made for TV), Days of Heaven, La Gueule Ouverte (Pialat), Lazybones (Borzone), The Night of the Hunter, Le Plaisir, La Poulette Grise (McLaren), Tirez sur le Pianiste, Wild River, The World of Apu.

It will indeed be interesting to see if there's still any consensus. I suspect 247 movies will tie for first place.

CHARLES BARR

UK

Ingeborg Holm (Sjöström), The End of St Petersburg, Random Harvest, A Canterbury Tale (Powell/Pressburger), The Pirate (Minnelli), Fort Apache, Rear Window, Sansho Dayu, Kiss Me Stupid, King Lear (Brook). Chronological order.

LASSE BERGSTROM

Sweden *Expressen*

The Adventures of Robin Hood, L'Avventura, Battleship Potemkin, The Birth of a Nation, Citizen Kane, 8½, Jules et Jim, Modern Times, My Darling Clementine, Wild Strawberries.

CLAUDE BEYLIE

France *L'Avant-Scène Cinéma*

Le Voyage à travers l'Impossible (Méliès), The Birth of a Nation, Sunrise, The Scarlet Empress, La Règle du Jeu, Le Plaisir, Sansho Dayu, Der Tiger von Eschnapur/Das Indische Grabmal (Lang), Gertrud, A Countess from Hong-Kong. Chronological order.

As to watching these films on a TV screen, no way! It is still possible, fortunately, to obtain prints.

MARJORIE BILBOW

UK *Screen International*

The Adventures of Robin Hood (Keighley/Curtiz), The African Queen, Bambi, The Band Wagon, Casablanca, David Copperfield (Cukor), A Matter of Life and Death, Stagecoach, The Third Man, The Wizard of Oz.

PETER BISKIND

USA *American Film*

The Godfather (Part I), Jaws, Kiss Me Deadly, Metropolis, Modern Times, On the Waterfront, Battleship Potemkin, La Règle du Jeu, Seven Samurai, Tout Va Bien.

PASCAL BONITZER

France *Cahiers du Cinéma*

City of Women, Limelight, Le Mépris, Moonfleet (Lang), Night of the Demon (Jacques Tourneur), Notorious, Ordet (Dreyer), Oyu-Sama (Mizoguchi), Parsifal (Syberberg), Touch of Evil.

GEOFF BROWN

UK *Radio Times*

The Bank Dick, La Belle et la Bête, Black Narcissus, King-size Canary (Tex Avery), Listen to Britain, Monsieur Verdoux, Mouchette, Perfect Day (James Parrott), Rainbow Dance (Len Lye), La Règle du Jeu.

PER CALUM

Denmark *Kosmorama*

The Cameraman, The Magnificent Ambersons, The Maltese Falcon, My Darling Clementine, The Quiet Man, Rio Bravo, She Wore a Yellow Ribbon, Singin' in the Rain, To Have and Have Not, 2001: A Space Odyssey.

VINCENT CANBY

USA *New York Times*

City Lights, The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie, Jules et Jim, The Magnificent Ambersons, Nights of Cabiria, Playtime, La Règle du Jeu, Sherlock Jr., Singin' in the Rain, Some Like It Hot.

MICHEL CIMENT

France *Positif*

Ugetsu Monogatari, Sherlock Jr., La Règle du Jeu, The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie, Madame de..., Sunrise, My Darling Clementine, Touch of Evil, Singin' in the Rain, 8½.

Not to look biased I did not mention any of my favourite films of directors to whom I devoted or will devote shortly a book or a film, but which of course form the 'shadow cabinet' of my 'official' list: The Wedding March (Stroheim), The Music Room (Ray), Wild River (Kazan), Salvatore Giuliano (Rosi), Accident (Losey), 2001: A Space Odyssey (Kubrick), The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes (Wilder), Puzzle of a Downfall Child (Schatzberg), Leo the Last (Boorman), The Travelling Players (Angelopoulos).

LORENZO CODELLI

Italy

Barry Lyndon, Days of Heaven, Heaven Can Wait, The Long Goodbye, Red Hot Riding Hood (Tex Avery), Some Like It Hot, Sullivan's Travels, Totò a Colori (Steno), The Unknown (Browning), Wild River.



JOHN COLEMAN

UK *New Statesman*

Boudou Sauvè des Eaux, The Camera-man (Keaton), Charulata, L'Enfant Sauvage, Gregory's Girl, Ikiru, The Lady with the Little Dog (Heifits), The Magnificent Ambersons, Singin' in the Rain, Smiles of a Summer Night.

RICHARD COMBS

UK *Monthly Film Bulletin*

Barry Lyndon + Day of the Fight (Kubrick), Dream Street (Griffith), Escape from Alcatraz (Siegel), Le Feu Follet, Major Dundee, 7 Women, Signs of Life, Ten Days' Wonder (Chabrol), The Tragedy of a Ridiculous Man, Ulzana's Raid.

No works of 'classical' perfection, romanticism and overreaches only; and no single films from directors (Welles, Buñuel, Hitchcock) whose award must be for Lifetime Achievement.

KEITH CONNOLLY

Australia *The Herald*

Citizen Kane, La Règle du Jeu, Bicycle Thieves, The Conformist, Winter Light (Bergman), Viridiana, Seven Samurai,

Jules et Jim, 8½, The Godfather I & II.

Rationalise though I might, I couldn't in all honesty include an Australian film. Not yet.

PETER COWIE

UK *International Film Guide*

City Lights, Days and Nights in the Forest, The Godfather, Hiroshima mon Amour, Jules et Jim, Man of Marble, Seven Samurai, The Seventh Seal, Shane, La Strada.

I suspect that Truffaut will march up your charts, Antonioni (and even Godard) will slip down, and Fassbinder will make a mark...

EDGARDO COZARINSKY

France

Six all-time best: Intolerance, Gunnar Hedes Saga (Stiller), Trouble in Paradise, The Fountainhead, all Fritz Lang's work as one multi-episodic serial, La Règle du Jeu. Four post-1975 films about the post-1975 world: Salò, Three Women, Fingers (James Toback), The Third Generation (Fassbinder).

MICHAEL DEMPSEY

USA

Badlands, Barry Lyndon, Charulata, The Eclipse, The End of Summer (Ozu), Jules et Jim, Lawrence of Arabia, The Magnificent Ambersons, Sansho Dayu, Vertigo.

DAVID DENBY

USA

L'Avventura, Citizen Kane, 8½, The General, The Godfather (Parts I and II), Intolerance, Jules et Jim, La Règle du Jeu, Seven Samurai, The Third Man.

VIRGINIA DIGNAM

UK *Morning Star*

A Woman of Paris, Z, Les Enfants du Paradis, King Lear (Kozintsev), Tom Jones, The Travelling Players, A Man for All Seasons, Some Like It Hot, Los Olvidados, The Third Man.

WOLF DONNER

West Germany

Andrei Roublev, Citizen Kane, Cries and Whispers, The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie, 8½, The Marriage of Maria Braun, Morocco, Pierrot le Fou, La Terra Trema, A Woman Under the Influence (Cassavetes).

MARIO DORMINSKY

Portugal *Cinema Novo*

Apocalypse Now, Battleship Potemkin, Bicycle Thieves, The Blue Angel, Citizen Kane, The Elephant Man, Metropoli-



lis, La Règle du Jeu, Senso, 2001: A Space Odyssey.

RAYMOND DURGNAT

UK

The Big Night (Losey), Blonde Venus, Chinese Checkers (Stephen Dwoskin), Dom (Borowczyk/Lenica), Fellini-Satyricon, The 5000 Fingers of Dr T (Roy Rowland), Le Mystère Koumiko (Chris Marker), Ruby Gentry, Vampyr, Yellow Submarine.

How painful to pass over true friends like Renoir and Franju, Groucho and Kong, who saw me through from infancy to early middle age. Whatever this list suggests, my soul remains a 30s baby's, born of poetic realism and the magic realms around it—of, let's say, Next of Kin and Les Enfants du Paradis, of Hellzapoppin' and Senza Pieta...

ROGER EBERT

USA *Chicago Sun-Times*

Bonnie and Clyde, Casablanca, Citizen Kane, La Dolce Vita, Aguirre, Wrath of God, Notorious, Persona, Taxi Driver, The Third Man, 2001: A Space Odyssey.

LOTTE H. EISNER

France

Battleship Potemkin, The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser, La Grande Illusion, Grapes of Wrath, Greed, Kagemusha, M (Lang), The Music Room, The Passion of Joan of Arc, Tabu (Murnau).

ALLEN EYLES

UK *Films and Filming*

An Autumn Afternoon, L'Avventura, Les Enfants du Paradis, Le Feu Follet, Holiday (Cukor), The Lady with the Little Dog, The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp, The Magnificent Ambersons, The Searchers, Sullivan's Travels.

DAN FAINARU

Israel *Jerusalem Post*

Citizen Kane, 8½, Ikiru, Monsieur Verdoux, Muriel, W.R.—Mysteries of the Organism (Makavejev), Persona, Pierrot le Fou, La Règle du Jeu, Viridiana.

STEPHEN FARBER

USA

Citizen Kane, 8½, Jules et Jim, Lawrence of Arabia, Lolita, The Music Lovers, Nashville, Notorious, La Règle du Jeu, Sunset Boulevard.

JACQUES FIESCHI

France *Cinématographe*

Tabu (Murnau), Madame de..., Broken Blossoms, The Devil Is a Woman, The Wedding March, Notorious, The Marriage Circle, The Searchers, The Band Wagon, Le Genou de Claire.

PHILIP FRENCH

UK *The Observer*

The Lady Vanishes, Bringing Up Baby, La Règle du Jeu, Citizen Kane, Singin' in the Rain, The Quiet Man, Seven Samurai, Ride the High Country, Salvatore Giuliano, California Split.

LUDWIG GESEK

Austria *Filmkunst*

Citizen Kane, City Lights, Don Quixote (Pabst), Faust (Murnau), Les Jeux Interdits, Maskerade, Menschen am Sonntag, Moulin Rouge, The Third Man, Tree of the Wooden Clogs.

JOHN GILLET

UK

Charulata, Earth, The House on Trubnaya Square (Boris Barnet), Late Spring, The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp, Loyal 47 Ronin of the Genroku Era (Mizoguchi), The Marriage Circle, Our Hospitality, La Règle du Jeu, They Were Expendable.



PENELOPE GILLIATT

UK

The Navigator, The Apu Trilogy, Some Like It Hot, She Wore a Yellow Ribbon, The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie, Citizen Kane, the Wajda Trilogy (A Generation, Kanal, Ashes and Diamonds), Zéro de Conduite, L'Enfant Sauvage, Ikiru, Slave of Love (Nikita Mikhalkov), War and Peace (Bondarchuk), La Règle du Jeu, Alphaville, La Terra Trema.

GIOVANNI GRAZZINI

Italy *Corriere della Sera*

Andrei Roublev, The Circus, Cries and Whispers, The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie, 8½, Mouchette, The Night of San Lorenzo (The Tavianis), Tree of the Wooden Clogs, 2001: A Space Odyssey, Umberto D.

RICHARD GRENIER

USA *Commentary*

Battleship Potemkin, October, Alexander Nevsky, Citizen Kane, Seven Samurai, Los Olvidados, The Devils (Ken Russell), Fellini's Casanova, Breaker Morant (Beresford), True Confessions (Ulu Grosbard).

JOSÉ LUIS GUARNER
Spain

The Crowd, The General, The Magnificent Ambersons, Monsieur Verdoux, La Prise de Pouvoir par Louis XIV, La Règle du Jeu, The Searchers, Sunrise, Vertigo, Yang Kwei Fei (Mizoguchi).

CHIDANANDA DAS GUPTA
India

Andrei Roublev, Le Crime de M Lange, The Gold Rush, Jules et Jim, Late Autumn, La Notte, The Passion of Joan of Arc, Smiles of a Summer Night, Seven Samurai, The World of Apu.

PER HADDAL

Norway *Aftenposten*
Andrei Roublev, Citizen Kane, Un Condamné à Mort s'est Echappé, Day of Wrath, Modern Times, Les Quatre Cents Coups, The Searchers, The Seventh Seal, Vertigo, Viridiana.

SANDRA HALL

Australia *The Bulletin*
Annie Hall, Autumn Sonata, L'Avventura, Chinatown, Citizen Kane, The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie, Last Tango in Paris, Nashville, Notorious, Singin' in the Rain.

PETER HARCOURT

Canada *The Canadian Forum*
L'Atalante, Deux ou Trois Choses que je Sais d'Elle, Madame de..., Muriel, Nazarin, A Passion (Bergman), La Strada, Sunrise, Le Vieux Pays ou Rimbaud est Mort (Jean Pierre Lefebvre), Yang Kwei Fei (Mizoguchi).

MOLLY HASKELL

USA
Belle de Jour, Madame de..., The Magnificent Ambersons, Ordet (Dreyer), Pierrot le Fou, La Règle du Jeu, The Searchers, Sherlock Jr., Sunrise, Vertigo.

JOHN HINDE

Australia *Week in Film*
Au Hasard, Balthazar, Citizen Kane, Dersu Uzala, The General, High Noon, Hullabaloo over Georgie and Bonnie's Pictures, Le Mépris, O Lucky Man, Slave of Love (Mikhalkov), Stagecoach, The Third Man.

HANSERIK HJERTÉN

Sweden *Dagens Nyheter*
Andrei Roublev, The Childhood of Maxim Gorki, La Dolce Vita, Earth, The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser, The Gold Rush, Greed, Ikiru, Los Olvidados, The Passion of Joan of Arc.



J. HOBERMAN

USA *The Village Voice*
Au Hasard, Balthazar, Deux ou Trois Choses que je Sais d'Elle, The General, Intolerance, The Man with a Movie Camera, Othello (Welles), Rose Hobart (Joseph Cornell), Scenes from Under Childhood (Brakhage), The Searchers, Ten Minutes to Live (Oscar Micheaux).

RONALD HOLLOWAY

West Germany *Kino*
Citizen Kane, Man of Marble, Andrei Roublev, Ikiru, Nazarin, La Grande Illusion, The Pilgrim, The Passion of Joan of Arc, Intolerance, Man of Aran.

PENELOPE HOUSTON

UK *Sight and Sound*
L'Avventura, The Boat (Keaton), Citizen Kane, Days and Nights in the Forest, Listen to Britain, Ma Nuit chez Maud, Miracle at Morgan's Creek, Muriel, Il Posto, The Third Man.

EBBE IVERSEN

Denmark *Berlingske Tidende*
Aguirre, Wrath of God, Citizen Kane, The Conformist, Jules et Jim, My Darling Clementine, Nashville, The Navi-

gator, The Passenger (Antonioni), Red Beard (Kurosawa), Seven Samurai.

My fellow-countrymen shall probably hang me for high treason for not having included Carl Dreyer, but that's the way it will have to be.

GILLES JACOB

France
The African Queen, America, America, Dr Strangelove, Manhattan, North by Northwest, Orchestra Rehearsal (Fellini), La Règle du Jeu, To Be or Not To Be, Touch of Evil, Zéro de Conduite. *En considérant cette liste, je réalise que les dix films ont un point commun: ils déclenchent chez moi un plaisir du cinéma qui confine à l'extase.*

JULIAN JEBB

UK
La Peau Douce, L'Enfant Sauvage, Le Genou de Claire, Les Quatre Cents Coups, Day for Night, 8½, A Night at the Opera, La Baie des Anges, L'Avventura, Persona.

STEVE JENKINS

UK *Monthly Film Bulletin*
Detour (Edgar G. Ulmer), Kiss Me Deadly, A Matter of Life and Death, Mean Streets, Night of the Hunter, Once Upon a Time in the West, The Searchers, There's Always Tomorrow (Sirk), Touch of Evil, Vertigo.

NEIL JILLET/

ANTHONY CLARKE
Australia *The Age*
Apocalypse Now, Casablanca, Un Chien Andalou, The Fallen Idol, Ivan the Terrible, Lacombe Lucien, The Letter (Wyler), The Passion of Joan of Arc, Paths of Glory, Les Quatre Cents Coups.

ALBERT JOHNSON

USA
The Best Years of Our Lives, Citizen Kane, City Lights, Earth, Farrebique (Rouquier), Henry V, The Last Laugh, Nights of Cabiria, War and Peace (Bondarchuk), The World of Apu.

STANLEY KAUFFMANN

USA *The New Republic*
L'Avventura, Battleship Potemkin, The General, The Gold Rush, La Grande Illusion, The Marquise of O..., The Passion of Joan of Arc, Persona, Seven Samurai, Tokyo Story.

NICOLAS KENT

UK *Stills*
Aguirre, Wrath of God, Chimes at Midnight, Les Enfants du Paradis, The



Godfather, Nashville, The Passenger, Seven Samurai, Solaris, 2001: A Space Odyssey, The Wild Bunch.

TULLIO KEZICH

Italy *La Repubblica*
The Crowd, M (Lang), Man of Aran, Modern Times, La Grande Illusion, Alexander Nevsky, Stagecoach, Paisa, Sunset Boulevard, La Dolce Vita. Chronological order.

ARTHUR KNIGHT

USA
All That Jazz, L'Avventura, Bicycle Thieves, Citizen Kane, Day for Night, Dr Strangelove, E.T.: The Extra-terrestrial, Rashomon, Sherlock Jr., Singin' in the Rain.

I expect that this is a rather conservative list, but it represents not only 'desert island' movies, but also those that I still find useful for teaching—pictures that still make strong contact with today's student film-makers.

MARI KUTTNA

UK *The Lady*
Napoleon, The Travelling Players/The

Huntsmen, Some Like It Hot, Nashville, Confrontation, Man of Marble, Strike, Blowout (Ferreri), Days and Nights in the Forest, A New Leaf (Elaine May).

JOHN FRANCIS LANE

UK/Italy
Accattone, L'Avventura, Citizen Kane, La Dolce Vita, Les Enfants du Paradis, Henry V, Orphée, Some Like It Hot, La Terra Trema, 2001: A Space Odyssey.

Taking literally the concept of 'Desert Island Films' and so excluding the works of directors whose films should at this point be included en bloc among the best of all time, such as Eisenstein, Chaplin, Buñuel, Bergman, Renoir, etc.

JAMES LEAHY

UK
The Battle of Chile Parts 1 and 2 (Patricio Guzman), Bitter Victory, Ceddó (Sembene), Hanoi, Tuesday 13th (Santiago Alvarez), Masculin Féminin, The Only Son (Ozu), Une Partie de Campagne/The Golden Coach (Renoir double bill), The Searchers, Singin' in the Rain, Vampyr.

JAY LEYDA

USA
The Mother and the Law, Nanook of the North, A Woman of Paris, Greed, The General, October, The Passion of Joan of Arc, Arsenal, Un Chien Andalou, Zéro de Conduite, La Règle du Jeu, Citizen Kane, The Treasure of the Sierra Madre, Seven Samurai, Wild Strawberries.

TODD MCCARTHY

USA *Variety*
Chimes at Midnight, Le Crime de M Lange, Les Deux Anglaises et le Continent, The Devil Is a Woman, Les Enfants du Paradis, Heaven Can Wait, Lawrence of Arabia, Le Mépris, The Navigator, To Have and Have Not.

AITO MÄKINEN

Finland
L'Age d'Or, Battleship Potemkin, Britannia Hospital, Empire of the Senses, L'Innocente (Visconti), Journal d'un Curé de Campagne, Modern Times, Une Partie de Campagne, Seven Samurai (complete version), Star Wars.

If one wants to find any line in my list, it might be called Rebellion...

DEREK MALCOLM

UK *The Guardian*
An Autumn Afternoon, Barren Lives (Dos Santos), Charulata, El, The



Enigma of Kaspar Hauser, Madame de..., Rio Bravo, Touch of Evil, Ugetsu Monogatari, Wild Strawberries.

POUL MALMKJAER

Denmark *Kosmorama*
Cabaret, Citizen Kane, The Crowd, The Fatal Glass of Beer (Bruckman/W. C. Fields), Greed, The Leopard, La Règle du Jeu, Seven Samurai, Singin' in the Rain, Vampyr.

ROGER MANVELL

UK
Belle de Jour, Citizen Kane, 8½, The General, The Gold Rush, Hiroshima mon Amour, Intolerance, October, Persona, Seven Samurai (full version).

LOUIS MARCORRELLES

France *Le Monde*
The Awful Truth, Three Comrades, Mr Smith Goes to Washington, Primary (Leacock and Drew), La Région Centrale (Michael Snow), Amor de Perdição (Manoel de Oliveira), The Age of Earth (Glauber Rocha), Martinovits (Judith Elek), La Bête Lumineuse (Pierre Perrault), Britannia Hospital. Chronological order.

GAVIN MILLAR

UK *The Listener*
Bringing Up Baby, Citizen Kane, Dersu Uzala, The General, It's a Gift, Orchestra Rehearsal, Il Posto, La Règle du Jeu, Singin' in the Rain, Tirez sur le Pianiste.

I dare say everyone says the same, but there could be a different, equally heartfelt ten tomorrow.

TOM MILNE

UK
La Chienne, I Walked with a Zombie (Tourneur), Kiss Me Deadly, The Magnificent Ambersons, Moonrise, My Darling Clementine, The Night of the Hunter, True Heart Susie, Les Vampires, Les Yeux sans Visage.

JAMES MONACO

USA
The Big Sleep, Citizen Kane, Deux ou Trois Choses que je Sais d'Elle, 8½, The Godfather, It's a Wonderful Life, Modern Times, North by Northwest, Singin' in the Rain, 2001: A Space Odyssey.

GENE MOSKOWITZ

USA/France *Variety*
El Greco, The Life of Oharu, Limelight, M (Lang), The Quiet Man, La Règle du Jeu, The World of Apu, Zéro de Conduite.

GÜNTER NETZEBAND

East Germany *Film und Fernsehen*
Battleship Potemkin, Citizen Kane, Earth, The Gold Rush, Ich war 19 (Konrad Wolf), Ivan's Childhood, Modern Times, 1900, Ordinary Fascism (Romm), Rashomon.

GEOFFREY NOWELL-SMITH

UK
One Week (Keaton), A Propos de Nice, Une Partie de Campagne, Listen to Britain, A Valparaiso (Ivens), Toute la Mémoire du Monde, La Jetée, The Bridegroom, the Comedienne and the Pimp (Straub), Breakfast (Snow), Amy! (Mulvey/Wollen).

EDMOND ORTS

Spain *Dirigido por...*
All About Eve, Amarcord, Chimes at Midnight, Citizen Kane, The Leopard, The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance, The Misfits, North by Northwest, Providence, Singin' in the Rain.

DAVID OVERBEY

USA/France
L'Avventura, Le Ciel est à Vous (Grémillon), Gilda, Im Lauf der Zeit (Wenders),

Left to right: 'The Seven Samurai', 'The Lady with the Little Dog', 'The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie', 'Pierrot le Fou', 'La Jetée', 'A New Leaf'.

Over the page: 'Les Dames du Bois de Boulogne', 'Madame de...', 'Play-time', 'Our Hospitality'.



Lady from Shanghai, Letter from an Unknown Woman, Der müde Tod, Ossessione, Steamboat Bill Jr., Stromboli.

ENNO PATALAS

West Germany
From the Clouds to the Resistance (Straub/Huillet), Germany Year Zero (with original soundtrack), The Life of Oharu, Lola Montès, Nosferatu (Murnau), La Région Centrale, The Saga of Anatahan, Sauve Qui Peut (La Vie), Which Way to the Front (Jerry Lewis), While the City Sleeps.

BEATRIZ PACHECO PEREIRA

Portugal *Cinema Novo*
Apocalypse Now, Battleship Potemkin, Citizen Kane, The Elephant Man, Ivan the Terrible, Johnny Got His Gun (Dalton Trumbo), Kagemusha, M (Lang), Providence, Ugetsu Monogatari.

MICHEL PÉREZ

France *Le Matin*
L'Age d'Or, The General, King Kong, The Magnificent Ambersons, La Règle du Jeu, The Scarlet Empress, Schatten (Robison), Sunrise, Ugetsu Monogatari,

Under Capricorn, and all the Busby Berkeley numbers produced for Warner Brothers.

CHRIS PETIT

UK
Les Dames du Bois de Boulogne, Le Deuxième Souffle (Melville), The Goal-keeper's Fear of the Penalty, I Know Where I'm Going, The Man with the X-Ray Eyes (Corman), Out of the Past (Tourneur), Passion (Godard), Ride Lonesome (Boetticher), Spione, Voyage in Italy.

HANS GÜNTHER PFLAUM

West Germany *Süddeutsche Zeitung*
Un Condamné à Mort s'est Echappé, Francesco, Guiltare di Dio (Rossellini), Une Partie de Campagne, Pierrot le Fou, La Illusion Viaja en Tranvia (Buhnel), Nosferatu (Murnau), Stagecoach, Red River, Stalker, The Third Generation (Fassbinder: future decades will justify that choice!).

DAVID PIRIE

UK *Time Out*
American Graffiti, Chinatown, Close Encounters of the Third Kind, La Collectionneuse, The Devil Rides Out (Fisher), Illustrious Corpses, Invasion of the Body Snatchers, Pierrot le Fou, Splendour in the Grass, Vertigo.

The more films I see the more I marvel at how good a medium cinema is at conveying emotion and how comparatively poor it is at conveying intellectual ideas. Sam Fuller's dictum that the cinema is 'in a word ... emotion' from Pierrot seems to me almost exactly right.

DILYS POWELL

UK *Sunday Times, Punch*
Anna Karenina (Brown), Citizen Kane, City Lights, The General, The Grapes of Wrath, The Lady with the Little Dog, Le Million, On the Town, Rear Window, Umberto D.

Just ten out of the scores I should like to see again. Do I want to see Potemkin again? Frankly no; but I do want a Garbo, even if it isn't a masterpiece.

DEREK PROUSE

UK
L'Atalante, Citizen Kane, El, Manhattan, Mutter Krausen's Fahrt ins Glück (Piel Jutzi), October, Orphée, Ossessione, The Palm Beach Story, Three Brothers.



TIM PULLEINE

UK
L'Atalante, Barry Lyndon, Blow Up, Citizen Kane, Fires Were Started, It Happened One Night, Le Mépris, Naked City, North by Northwest, The Third Man.

JOHN PYM

UK *Sight and Sound*
A Bout de Souffle, Chimes at Midnight, Fat City, I Was Born But... (Ozu), Limelight, Manhattan, The Music Room, My Childhood Trilogy (Bill Douglas), The Palm Beach Story, Une Partie de Campagne.

MILAN RANKOVIC

Yugoslavia
Amarcord, Andrei Roublev, Ashes and Diamonds, Battleship Potemkin, Citizen Kane, 1900, The Passion of Joan of Arc, Rashomon, The Virgin Spring, Viridiana.

DON RANVAUD

UK *Framework*
La Hora de los Hornos (Solanas), L'Hypothèse du Tableau Volé (Ruiz), Invisible Adversaries (Valie Export), La Luna, The Man with a Movie

Camera, Rear Window, Salò, We Can't Go Home Again (Nicholas Ray), West Indies (Abid Med Hondo), Zorns Lemma (Frampton).

TONY RAYNS

UK
A Farewell to Arms (Borzage), Die Geburt der Nation (Klaus Wyborny), The House on Trubnaya Square, A Matter of Life and Death, Night and Fog in Japan (Oshima), Pierrot le Fou, The Scarlet Empress, Street Angel (Yuan Muzhi), Tale of the Late Chrysanthemums (Mizoguchi), Touch of Evil.

JOÃO CARLOS RODRIGUES

Brazil *Filme Cultura*
Greed, Vampyr, Voyage in Italy, The Eclipse, The Music Room, Scorpio Rising (Kenneth Anger), Terra em Transe (Rocha), Weekend, Shadow of Our Forgotten Ancestors (Paradjanov), An Actor's Revenge (Ichikawa). Chronological order.

JONATHAN ROSENBAUM

USA
Playtime, Gertrud, A Bout de Souffle, The Eclipse, Tale of the Late Chrysanthemums, City Lights, Céline et Julie vont en Bateau, La Nuit du Carrefour, Providence, Too Early, Too Late (Straub-Huillet).

PAUL ROTH

UK
Battleship Potemkin, Earth, Greed, Intolerance, Kameradschaft, Moana, The Last Laugh, Los Olvidados, Song of Ceylon, Umberto D.

E. RUBINSTEIN

USA
Belle de Jour, City Lights, How Green Was My Valley, Journal d'un Curé de Campagne, Madame de..., The Magnificent Ambersons, Notorious, La Règle du Jeu, Steamboat Bill, Jr., Vivre sa Vie.

For the absence of oriental films, I will (somewhat disingenuously) plead ignorance and a certain hesitation in the face of very alien cultural assumptions. For the absence of Murnau and Lang, Sternberg and Hawks, Truffaut and Resnais, I have no explanation whatever.

ANDREW SARRIS

USA *The Village Voice*
The Great Dictator, The Flowers of St Francis (Rossellini), Madame de...,



Le Mépris, La Règle du Jeu, The Searchers, Steamboat Bill, Jr., Tristana, Ugetsu Monogatari, Vertigo.

TADAO SATO

Japan *The Asahi Newspaper*
A Woman of Paris, Maskerade (Willi Forst), Une Partie de Campagne, Brief Encounter, Germany, Year Zero, My Life (Shi Hui), Tokyo Story, Pather Panchali, Ordet (Dreyer), Antonio das Mortes. Chronological order.

RICHARD SCHICKEL

USA *Time*
Casablanca, Citizen Kane, Dr Strangelove, It's a Gift (W. C. Fields), Manhattan, Red River, Singin' in the Rain, Sullivan's Travels, Trouble in Paradise, Vertigo.

The criterion in my case was never 'relevance', only delight...

YUKICHI SHINADA

Japan
A Bout de Souffle, Bonnie and Clyde, Citizen Kane, The Conformist, La Dolce Vita, The Drunken Angel (Kurosawa), Manhattan, Nashville, Pather Panchali, Tokyo Story.

YOSHIO SHIRAI

Japan
La Dolce Vita, Hiroshima mon Amour, The Life of Oharu, Ludwig (Visconti), Outcast of the Islands, Der Rest ist Schweigen (Kautner), Salvatore Giuliano, Die Ständerin (Willi Forst), Teorema, Tokyo Story.

SUSAN SONTAG

USA
Deux ou Trois Choses que je Sais d'Elle, Europa 51, High and Low (Kurosawa), Hitler, a Film from Germany, Le Mépris, Napoleon, La Règle du Jeu, Storm Over Asia, Tokyo Story, 2001: A Space Odyssey.

ELISABETH SÖRENSEN

Sweden *Svenska Dagbladet*
Christ Stopped at Eboli, Cries and Whispers, Fellini Roma, Une Giornata Particolare (Scola), The Marriage of Maria Braun, Miracolo a Milano, Missing, Molière (Ariane Mnouchkine), 1900, Tree of the Wooden Clogs.

MICHAEL SRAGOW

USA *Rolling Stone*
The Wild Bunch, Les Enfants du Paradis, The Godfather (Parts I and II), Citizen Kane, E.T.: The Extra-terrestrial, My Darling Clementine, The Treasure of the Sierra Madre, A Hard Day's Night, The Great Escape, Yankee Doodle Dandy (Curtiz).

ELLIOTT STEIN

USA
Ajantrik (Ghatak), An Actor's Revenge, The Bat Whispers (Roland West), Chandrakheha (S. S. Vasan), Gertrud, Gunnar Hedes Saga, King Kong, The 'Lullaby of Broadway' number in Gold Diggers of 1935 (Busby Berkeley), The Magnificent Ambersons, Why Not? (Shohei Imamura).

DAVID STRATTON

Australia
Greed, The General, La Grande Illusion, Citizen Kane, The Grapes of Wrath, Ikiru, Singin' in the Rain, North by Northwest, Dr Strangelove, Une Femme Mariée.

PHILIP STRICK

UK
Autumn Sonata, L'Avventura, E.T.: The Extra-terrestrial, French Cancan, Marnie, Meet Me in St Louis, Le Mépris, The Searchers, Solaris, 2001: A Space Odyssey.



ELIZABETH SUSSEX

UK
L'Age d'Or, Cries and Whispers, The Man with the Movie Camera, Mouchette, My Homeland (Vas), Nuit et Brouillard, Orphée, Pather Panchali, Stalker, Tokyo Story.

ALBERTO TABBIA

Argentina
Angel (Lubitsch), Badlands, Barry Lyndon, Citizen Kane, The Crowd, Dishonoured, Midnight (Leisen), Our Hospitality, La Règle du Jeu, Tokyo Story.

JOHN RUSSELL TAYLOR

UK
Cet Obscur Objet du Désir, Funny Face, The Great Waltz (Duvivier, Sternberg et al), Ivan the Terrible, Kind Hearts and Coronets, The Magnificent Ambersons, Marnie, The Old Dark House, Singin' in the Rain, The Thief of Baghdad.

PAUL TAYLOR

UK *Time Out*
Chimes at Midnight, Gun Crazy (Lewis), Kings of the Road, A Matter of Life and Death, Once Upon a Time

in the West, Out One: Spectre, Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid, Performance (Cammell/Roeg), Pickpocket, Le Samourai (Melville).

Each title arbitrarily heading an associated list of ten—at least. Fog Line (Larry Gottheim) or Straight and Narrow (Tony and Beverly Conrad) would be the shorts to put me in the mood for any of the above.

MAX TESSIER

France
Andrei Roublev, The Ceremony (Oshima), 8½, Greed, Ikiru, The Life of Oharu, The Music Room, Point Blank, Touch of Evil, The Travelling Players.

DAVID THOMSON

UK/USA
Céline et Julie vont en Bateau, Citizen Kane, The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie, Lola Montès, The Night of the Hunter, The Passenger, The River, Shanghai Express, To Have and Have Not, Ugetsu Monogatari, and as a necessary cheat, Bringing up Baby (for Cary Grant).

MARKKU TUULI

Finland
Aguirre, Wrath of God, Camouflage (Zanussi), City Girl (Murnau), Fireman's Street 25 (Szabó), The Godfather, I Was Born But... Love Me Tonight, Mahanagar, Our Hospitality, The Searchers.

ALEXANDER WALKER

UK *The Standard*
Camille, A Clockwork Orange, Les Dames du Bois de Boulogne, Death in Venice, Dr Strangelove, Killer's Kiss, Last Tango in Paris, Mephisto, Richard III, Triumph of the Will.

DAVID WILSON

UK
L'Avventura, The Burmese Harp, Citizen Kane, Letter from an Unknown Woman, The Navigator, The Night of the Hunter, Persona, Red River, La Règle du Jeu, The Travelling Players. Some reminders that the cinema can surprise and astonish, at a time when surprises are few and astonishment belongs to the past.

ROBIN WOOD

UK
Céline et Julie vont en Bateau, Chikamatsu Monogatari, Days of Heaven, Europa 51, Letter from an Unknown Woman, Rio Bravo, La Règle du Jeu, Tokyo Story, Tout Va Bien, Vertigo.



BASIL WRIGHT

UK
The Apu Trilogy, Earth, The Gold Rush, La Grande Illusion, Hiroshima mon Amour, Ivan the Terrible, Le Journal d'un Curé de Campagne, Los Olvidados, Sciuscià, Ugetsu Monogatari.

FRANCIS WYNNDHAM

UK
Build My Gallows High (Tourneur), Citizen Kane, Imitation of Life (Sirk), L'Innocente, Mirror, Monsieur Verdoux, Napoleon, La Règle du Jeu, A Star Is Born (Cukor), The Third Man.

KOICHI YAMADA

Japan *The Asahi Newspaper*
8½, El, The Fate of Lee Khan (King Hu), Hangmen Also Die, Hatari, The Man Who Disappeared Yesterday (Masahiro Makino), North by Northwest, La Règle du Jeu, Sherlock Jr., To Be or Not to Be.

HELENA YLÄNEN

Finland *Helsingin Sanomat*
L'Innocente, The Passenger, Peeping Tom, Rebel Without a Cause, Toni, Touch of Evil, Vertigo, Wagonmaster, Wild Strawberries, The World of Apu.

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S & S

The Critical



by

Gilbert Adair

Shhh! An usherette's torch, its tiny searchlight playing over the auditorium like the dying embers of an open fire reflected on a bedroom ceiling, guides a latecomer to his seat; from somewhere a whirring can be heard; as the studio logo looms monstrosly beneath their suddenly transparent folds, the cinema's curtains part with reluctance from their embrace...

It may appear as strange that the opening paragraph of this essay on British film critical attitudes should be couched in an idiom so sentimental it would need only the accompaniment of a few moonstruck measures of Chopin's 'Tristesse' to sound like the narration of a Robert Youngson compilation movie. But it isn't so strange when you consider that film critics constitute maybe the only class of humanity for which the big white screen still operates as a kind of collective security blanket, for which the cinema has succeeded against all the odds in preserving its necromantic properties, its sheer hallucinatorily dotty magic. Whether employed by a national newspaper or by one of innumerable sad little specialised journals, whether grown old in service or young enough to speculate with wonderment, as Chris Auty once did in *Time Out*, about the 'original audiences' of Godard's *Le Mépris* (1963), as though both movie and audiences belonged to some inexpressibly dim, unknowable past, the British film critic's enthusiasm for the medium which

betrays him week after week, year after year, is an apparently bottomless well.

For example, I recently mentioned to a fellow critic that I would be away from London for a while. 'Where are you off to?' he asked me. 'Venice.' He looked at me with a bewildered expression. 'Venice? But Venice is in September,' he said.

Why, naturally, Venice 'is' in September. Likewise, Cannes 'is' in May. And nothing will persuade the film critic that they don't come to life, like Brigadoon, for just two weeks every year, before subsiding with a voluptuous kerplunk! into the Mallarméan—or Minnellian—*azur*.

It is unfortunate that this enthusiasm somehow evaporates by the time our critic is installed at the typewriter... unfortunate that, come Wednesday afternoon, which is usually when he is ready to crank out his review, the professional journalist in him seems slightly ashamed of the trusting, candid spectator he was at 10.30 on Monday morning. Still, there it is—a sublime if ephemeral brand of quixotry that has caused more than one retired critic to go on turning out for press shows like an unemployed school leaver nostalgically loitering at the playground gates—there's the good news! Now for the bad news.

And the prize item of bad news is that, the odd exception apart, film reviewing in Britain has hardly budged in over three decades. To be sure, sensibilities have been refined (we are all auteursists now), and there has been a more generous acknowledgment of the cinema's essential eclecticism, but these adjust-

Derek Malcolm ('The Guardian')



Philip French ('The Observer')

ments have almost always been preceded by theoretical shunting in magazines like *Sequence* and *SIGHT AND SOUND* and *Movie*, and by the industry's own supply-and-demand responses to public taste. Rare is the film journalist who has ever helped to *create a climate*, or even helped one along that was already in business. And the most an average reader, perusing 'his' critic over Sunday brunch, is likely to have been aware of in the way of change is that merry-go-round of personal hobby-horses that signals the departure of one columnist and the arrival of another. From Dilys Powell in the *Sunday Times*, whose hobby-horse was real horses falling agonisingly on their necks in Westerns, to Philip French in the *Observer*, who likes to drop facts the way other people drop names—there, if you like, is a true potted history of British film criticism.

What makes it all the more amazing is the number of skins the cinema itself has sloughed off during the same period. Of course, to a generation which regards *Le Mépris* as an *old film*, the early 50s must seem remote beyond words. Especially as movies that have long since assumed a near-classic status, rich, potent fare by Ray and Sirk and Aldrich and Fuller, were then actually being released—*sometimes two or three a week*, think of it!—on a quite regular, bizarrely non-revival basis in ABCs and Odeons up and down the country. Instead of European movies, there were quaint things called 'Continental films', where for each work of art, such as *La Ronde* or *La Terra Trema*, there was *Le Mouton a cinq pattes* with

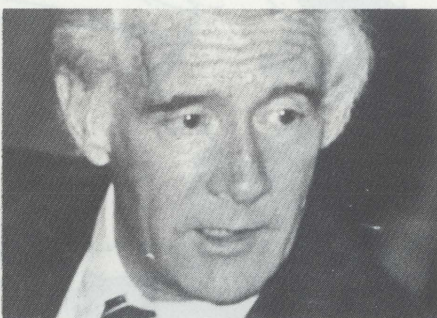
'My readers may not about art, but they

Faculty or...

Fernandel or *Femmes de Paris* with Robert Dhéry and Colette Brosset. As for the domestic product, well, with its lockjawed, ration-book sincerity, its below-stairs camaraderie and its wafer-thin, thinner than cardboard, characterisations, it got to the point where, as an adolescent, I tended to confuse my then favourite film-makers, Basil Dearden and Michael Relph, with Basil Radford and Naunton Wayne, and believed that they, too, must sport loud tweed plus-fours and brogues, and that Dearden, who I knew was the director, must yell *Fore!* instead of *Action!*, and be greeted on completion of some particularly neat camera set-up with a call from Relph of 'Good shot, old man!'

There, as I recall (or imagine) them, were the early 50s. At which point, however, the floodgates opened. Cinema-Scope (about which C. A. Lejeune, the *doyenne*, as she was always called, of the critical sorority, wrote that it made her feel she 'was sitting inside a monster pillar-box, looking out through the slot at a world in the rough proportions of a dachshund'), Cinerama, 3-D and even SmelloVision, road show blockbusters, the Bergmania that got up an impressive head of steam with *The Seventh Seal*, the New York Underground that never did, Free Cinema, the *nouvelle vague* along with divers other New Waves, *cinéma-vérité* or (as it came later to be known, with quite a loss in translation) Direct Cinema, minimalist cinema, the post-1968, New Testament guise of Our Lord of the Jump-Cut, Jean-Luc God, disaster movies, nostalgia movies, the

David Robinson ('The Times')



Alexander Walker ('The Standard')

Movie Brats and the Lucas-Spielberg axis, mystifyingly conflating the functions of producer, director and popcorn-eating spectator, and, oh, cycles upon cycles of cycles—all were to succeed each other at a dizzying rate.

The cinema never boasted such an idiosyncratic collection of *isms* in any comparable stretch of its history. And the critics meanwhile? Forsyth Hardy, of the *Scotsman*, crisply summed up the general attitude: 'I always tried to have in mind the principles: "Discover the purpose, judge its worth, criticise the technique".'

No matter that, as a prescription for dealing with most of the aforementioned innovations, it was about as useful as a literary editor advising J. R. R. Tolkien that, yes, certainly, he had talent, real talent, but perhaps he might better apply it to writing about the things he knew best, instead of squandering it on ... pixies. No matter—it would have required a brave colleague to dispute the authority of this trinity of critical responsibilities. The Siamese twins of purpose and technique, or content and form, had been operated on, and the operation had been pronounced a complete success. Furthermore, the essence of that content, its (moral? political? literary?) *worth*, ideally preceded the very existence of the film.

But what about thematic criticism? Would you care to handle that one, Gordon Gow, of the BBC and *Films and Filming*? 'I've always been cautious about identifying directors too closely with the subjects of their films.' Objectiv-

ity as a desirable aim? Campbell Dixon, *Daily Telegraph*: 'All criticism is prejudice ...' Art? Politics? Let the *doyenne* herself bring down those two big birds with one stone: 'There's no longer any point in talking "art" to readers. They know as much about film art as I do, and are generally much more concerned than I am (but that's another story!) with social significance.' Neither art nor social significance—exactly what *were* you concerned with, Caroline? (The answer, as she expressed it elsewhere, turned out to be, wouldn't you know, 'a good film of its kind'.)

There is nothing that concerns the contemporary critic more, of course, than art and social significance. So no one could conceivably write for publication these days, as the priceless C. A. Lejeune (again) did: 'I am ready to declare categorically that films are not an art.' Wow. Or display the wonderful disregard for ordinary socio-economic realities that allowed Peter Baker, in *Films and Filming*, to ponder the implications of Stanley Kramer's *On The Beach* (a movie he favourably compared to 'the great Soviet silent propaganda films') in these terms:

How do you feel, knowing you are sitting on the beach in the sunshine ... for the last time? Knowing that no longer can the friends around you catch trout from a mountain stream, drive a Ferrari to win a coveted race, sip a sherry before a game of billiards in the club?

On the other hand, a whole lot of movie criticism *still* reads like a series of paraphrases of Richard Mallett's *compte*

Gavin Millar ('The Listener')



know much know what I like'

rendu (in *Punch*) on coming to grips with an untidily collaborative medium:

Very many moviegoers asking for an opinion simply say 'Is it good?'—it never occurs to them that any reply must be qualified. To a man asking this one might reply 'Well, nearly anybody will like the first twenty minutes, but then comes a sequence that seems dreadfully artificial; though the thing would be almost worth seeing for its visual beauty alone; then one can say x is very good, but y is splendid, and there's some wonderful direction of complicated group scenes—and on the whole the script is very well done ... though it's rather too long, and some of the parts are irritatingly overemphasised.' He would just be baffled and annoyed, and repeat his question. 'Yes, but is it good?'

If Mallett had been asked the time, he would probably never have got beyond describing his watch-face.

To be fair, newspaper critics in particular are subject to a variety of pressures. They must cater to a naive, unschooled readership whose indifference to *The Art of the Film* could not be more absolute (I mean, their editors). And a peculiar occupational hazard had to be overcome. In the United States, everyone, they say, holds down two jobs, his own and that of movie critic. In Britain, paradoxically, that used also to be applicable to the critics themselves. Novelists, playwrights, sportswriters and whatever Fleet Street odd-job man happened to be professionally at a loose end—into film criticism! The culmination of that policy was arrived at in 1969, when the novelist Penelope Mortimer began moonlighting as a critic for the *Observer*. In a homey little interview, entitled 'Meet Mrs Mortimer', designed to acquaint the newspaper's readers with its newest acquisition, she offered a blunt enough indication of what they might expect from her. I quote at random (almost): 'It doesn't matter who the director is ... I'm against film critics giving technical advice ... The cinema is only a very minor art—if it is an art at all ...' She saw herself as 'in the "Let's go to the Odeon after supper" pack. It's one of the *nicest* things you can do.' (My—though they're really the word's own, somewhat Miss Marplish—italics.)

The trouble with Mrs Mortimer, however, was not her preference for a movie over postprandial table talk, it was that her facts were occasionally more exciting and original than her opinions. In a spectacular, conversation-stopping gaffe, she affirmed, when reviewing *Topaz*, that 'Although Hitchcock seems as much part of the cinema as Hemingway of literature, he has in fact been making films for only 18 years—a comparative newcomer.' Transpose the two H's, visualise the same phrase in the *Observer's* book pages—well, the mind boggles.

Unfortunately, having conceded the unwisdom of entrusting film criticism to amateurs, we are left with another type



A very minor art.

of problem. For the real professionals, a column has come to represent *tenure*, tenure from which they cannot easily be prised. Bright, ambitious criticlets, hungry, steely-eyed freelances not long down from Oxbridge, tigerishly stalk the plinth of every newspaper and magazine column, waiting for a critic to drop. But there's nothing doing. The critics have dug themselves in like sitting tenants under the Rent Act, and most of them are there even now. So that, with cinema audiences inexorably sliding down the age-scale, to the point where, for an intelligent adult, actually stepping out to see a movie is beginning to acquire the amusingly dated, childhood-slumming quality of a visit to the circus, there may now exist in some instances as much as a two-generational gap between critic and movie-going public. In a nutshell: People who go to the movies no longer read reviews, and people who read reviews no longer go to the movies. (I shall speak of the exceptions later.)

What then, if anything, is to become of the week-in, week-out, workaday reviewer? Quite simply, he will have to turn himself into a critic in the real sense of the word. He will have to start exploring the raw, the untested, the uncoded, however austere, thereby aligning himself with his colleagues in music, literary and art criticism. Show up at NFT retrospectives, not merely their indulgently selective screenings for the press. Cease to wear his heart stitched to his sleeve like a Star of David (a moratorium on such words as *sincere* and *compassionate* and *brave* should do the trick). Stand up and be counted in the fight against censorship, VAT and, why not, the absurdity, comparable to its licensing laws, of Britain's cinema schedules. Above all, if it was important in the 60s to say *yes* to the cinema, even much of mainstream cinema, he will now have to learn how to say *no*. To all the sequels and prequels, to all that hi-fi sci-fi and lowbrow know-how—no no no no no. No!

Before the Revolution

Criticism being as fragmented with cranky, mutually antagonistic theorising as it is these days, it's sometimes forgotten just how unselfconscious the whole business was back in the 50s. I am talking not only of the Establishment press, whose practice during subsequent intellectual blitzes, when words like *auteur* and *signifiant* would come buzzing over the Channel like V-1 rockets, was to withdraw into the bunkers in a calm and orderly fashion, there to sweat it out (*London Can Take It!*) until the All Clear sounded. No, it was just as true of weightier publications. For example, in Paul Rotha's *The Film Till Now*, for many years the standard text, the Bible of British film criticism, theory, or what passed for it (i.e. a kind of pragmatic humanism), was squeezed into those spaces between the lines that most readers tend to skip. And though, certainly, the Documentary School could still claim its hard core of resident ideologues (Grierson, Rotha, Basil Wright), the movement's earnest, man's-humanity-to-man bias—to adapt the celebrated crack about Western Union: If you want to send a message, call GPO—seemed in the cautious dawn of the New Elizabethan Era as drab a reminder of the past as a demob suit.

Of the two influential magazines to emerge after the war, *Sequence* and, later, a refurbished *SIGHT AND SOUND*, the former falls outside the scope of this

essay, it being solely a product of the 40s; as for the latter, I feel it would be not quite plausible for me to discuss it here, its history, in any case, having been covered by David Wilson in his Introduction to the recently published *Sight and Sound: A Fiftieth Anniversary Selection*. But to appreciate the full impact of the Cultural Revolution that was to hit the critical scene, it might be useful to glance at them for a second.

Sequence, which ran up a total of fourteen issues, was edited in various affiliations by Gavin Lambert, Lindsay Anderson, Peter Ericsson, Penelope Houston and Karel Reisz. Its importance—and it can fairly be termed this country's first modern film journal—lay not in adherence to any precise point of view, but in fostering novel standards in taste. Its enthusiastic promotion of musicals & Sturges & Ford & Cocteau & Clair (though, by comparison with the delirious encomia that have since been heaped on some of those, the enthusiasm now reads almost like damning with faint praise) seemed to imply that, for once in British film criticism, here were serious critics actually taking the side of colour, wit, myth and fantasy. In *Sequence 5*, Anderson even teetered on the edge of formulating his own *Ur-Auteur Theory*, though he drew back sharply enough with an evergreen word of warning:

So, in this gathering together, this fusion, there must be a central figure, one man conscious of the relative significance of every shot, the shape and flow of every sequence. But he cannot stand alone; he stands with, dependent on, his author and his cameraman. No doubt in an ideal world the same man would fulfil each function, but it is no use writing criticism for an ideal world.

It is no use writing criticism for an ideal world. In an ideal world, that phrase would be engraved on the plinth of every newspaper column and the portico of every auteurist Pantheon.

Lambert left *Sequence* to edit *SIGHT AND SOUND*, where he was succeeded in 1956 by its present editor. *SIGHT AND SOUND* has had to put up with a deal of adverse comment over the years, each new-minted magazine using it as the wall against which to play critical squash. As I say, the debate will surely be taken up again elsewhere. Nothing, though, appears capable of damaging its prestige abroad. I recall, in Hollywood some years ago, trying to set up an uncommissioned interview with Billy Wilder, who was then preparing *Fedora*. I was getting nowhere. I was told not to call them, they would call me. Then I thought to drop, not quite legitimately, the name of the magazine to which I contributed most regularly. Whereupon, I was flashed a dazzling Open Sesame smile, one I have since come to associate with hoteliers and booking clerks on presentation of an American Express credit card. 'SIGHT AND SOUND?' the smile flashed at me. 'That'll do nicely.'

The 'Movie' Brats

In June 1962 a bright, brand new magazine materialised, its name a one-word manifesto—a fact, however, of which no one save its own founders were for the moment aware. *Movie* (price 2/6 or 75 cents) was both edited and designed by Ian Cameron, who, while still an undergraduate, had been responsible for the film coverage of the arts-and-politics review *Oxford Opinion*. It isn't customary to bracket designing a magazine with editing it, but for *Movie* the customary scale of values has to be revised. With their creamy white margins, their clean, almost outsize typefaces and their cool and spare and Syrie Maughamish use of colour, Cameron's layouts for the new magazine represent the only instance I know of where the *nouvelle vague*'s influence on the British film scene proved to be a wholly beneficial one.

From *The Film Till Now* up to early 60s issues of *SIGHT AND SOUND*, most published photographic stills from the history of the cinema had tended to reproduce like Xeroxes of the Turin Shroud, their fuzzy grey uniformity making it hard to tell decade from decade, let alone movie from movie. Bunched together on the coarse, mustard-coloured leaves of prewar film histories, frame enlargements from certified classics (*Newsky*, *La Bête Humaine*—ah, those railway tracks!) seemed to be coated with the same ectoplasmic rust as other so-called 'classics' which surely no one any longer wanted to see (Ekk's *Road to Life*, Leopold Lindtberg's *Four in a Jeep*, umpteen humanist tracts from Emmer or Ermler). And after about thirty years of regular exposure, more than a few such icons had come to acquire the cosy pressed-flower familiarity of snapshots in some previous generation's family album. If you clapped eyes just once more on Stroheim's neck

brace or Cherkassov's curling goatee (his features, if inverted, would probably form a second, slightly less successful face, as in a Rex Whistler caricature), you felt you would throw up over them.

Movie's illustrations, on the other hand, were not so much faded snaps as glossy advertisements, advertisements for a kind of cinema everyone could zestfully respond to, with nary a whiff of Rotha or *SIGHT AND SOUND* or those solemn university film societies with their so thoughtful double bills of *Orphée* and *Les Enfants du Paradis*, or Pudovkin's *Mother and Hellzapoppin'*. (To the film society mind, of course, *Hellzapoppin'* wasn't all, maybe not at all, light relief—in a world in which even Surrealism had gone mad, had itself become surreal, Olsen and Johnson were Surrealists, Martha Raye an unwitting *consoeur* of her near-namesake Man.)

To illustrate an interview with Vincente Minnelli in *Movie*'s pilot issue was a still from *Home from the Hill* of Robert Mitchum in a deep leather armchair, a manly brick fireplace to his right, a pack of floppy hound dogs at his feet. No doubt about it, he inhabited a vastly different universe from that of Emil Jannings in his Expressionistic washroom or the white-haired old college professor who played Umberto D. But could Robert Mitchum also be Art? For heaven's sake, how could John Saxon and Sandra Dee (featured in an adjacent still from *The Reluctant Debutante*) be Art? Didn't it smack just a tad of Hollywood's assembly line when a movie contrived to look as new, as indecently streamlined, as a new automobile or kitchen unit? And yet, exactly as if one of those *Saturday Evening Post* covers by Norman Rockwell (which *Home from the Hill* resembled somewhat) were exhibited in the Prado, where its usurped prominence would take some getting used to, but once you had got used to it, why yes, yes! it didn't finally seem at all incongruous beside the El Grecos and the Goyas, just so would Mantra-like contemplation of Mitchum in his butch leather armchair provoke some untoward stirrings in the cinephile's (or cinephilistine's) vitals.

I have had two reasons for concentrating at length on *Movie*'s layouts: (1) because they constituted in themselves a form of *mise en scène* and mirrored the magazine's theoretical preoccupations; and (2) because auteurism, which was the commodity *Movie* was selling by mail-order, has always been—in Anglo-Saxon countries, at least—a pure question of faith, of epiphany, of *seeing the light*. One minute you were baffled, you were outraged, the next you actually knew what they were talking about—and that was enough to make you too a full-fledged Moonie auteurist. And soon your voice too would swell the hallelujah chorus of Author! Author!

The tale had properly commenced, as these tales frequently do, across the Channel—with *Cahiers du Cinéma* and its *politique* (not *théorie*) des auteurs.



'That'll do nicely.'

This *politique* had been requisitioned lock, stock and the scrapings of the barrel by the New York critic Andrew Sarris, who metamorphosed it into what he termed the Auteur Theory (not Policy). But much more was at stake than semantics in this shift from a policy to a self-styled theory. For all their village explaining, the *Movie* faction seldom managed to elevate (were, indeed, determined *not* to elevate) the American cinema from its traditional vocation as purveyor of populist escapism—except that, this time around, it was European High Culture they wanted to escape from. But Truffaut & Godard & Rivette & Rohmer & Chabrol, and all the other Young Turks who were swarming over French film criticism in the 50s, had turned to Hollywood as a model, as an exotic but perfectly practical alternative to *cinéma de papa*, that complacent lending library of literary adaptations in which the director's task consisted mostly in *behaving like a director*, i.e. pointing his index finger a lot, advising the cast how not to trip over the scenery, and calling out *action!* and *coupez!* in the correct order.

For Truffaut and Company, the American directors whom they adulated (an evocative roll-call—Hitchcock, Hawks, Sternberg, Lang...) offered living proof that personal movies could emerge from within an adamant capitalist system, that no one needed a well-turned script from Aurenche and Bost with its contracted-for quota of *mots d'auteur* if he were capable of speaking loudly and clearly through the divine medium itself, that a true *cinéma d'auteur* must be far more exalting (to practise) than a *cinéma de mots d'auteur*. At its best, the Hollywood product was to teach them—first as critics, then as film-makers—an invaluable lesson in economy of means, generosity of sentiment and energy of

performance, much the same virtues as an earlier Ecole de Paris—the Impressionists—had picked up from the Japanese print-makers. (Strangely enough, the Hitchcock and Hawks of *that* infatuation had been called Hiroshige and Hokusai...) And the fetishist indulgence in guns, girls and gangsters that marred their own movies was equivalent to the late nineteenth century fad for Japanese screens and fans: it was a kind of *américainiserie*.

If over the years some members of the original *nouvelle vague* succeeded in rivalling their despised elders in complacency, if it sometimes seemed as if *cinéma de papa* had gone only to be replaced by a *cinéma de fils à papa* (daddies' boys), the fact remains that, by their initiative, not only film criticism but the cinema itself had been revolutionised.

Oh, there were excesses. Interpretative delirium. Hitchcock the Catholic moralist; the MacMahoniens with their schismatic idolatry of Lang, Losey, Preminger and Walsh (the MacMahon is a tiny Parisian repertory theatre which specialises in old American movies: imagine if you can, in London, something like the 'Paris Pullmen'); 'Charlton Heston is an axiom'. As Peter Wollen remarked in *Signs and Meanings in the Cinema*, auteurism 'implies an operation of decipherment; it reveals authors where none had been seen before.' So forget Lana Turner sipping a malted milk through a straw at Schwab's: now it was the turn of critic and film-maker to be yoked in the clammy concourse of talent scout and ingenuous discovery. There they were, huddled together in interview, 'the beast with two backs'. Overnight, the history of Modernism was turned on its head. It was no longer the artist but his amanuensis who gratifyingly found himself charged with perpetrating absurdist

hoaxes. Interviews accorded by Hollywood directors to 'the French' (soon almost to become a generic term for all smart-alecky exegetists: you half-expected English auteurist critics to Frenchify their names the way English ballerinas used to Russify theirs) recalled deliberations between Holmes and Watson, with the Nigel Bruce-ish duffer of an artist straining to keep pace with the Great Detective's powers of reasoning. And since in the end it proved a shade embarrassing for these interviews to be so long on questions and so very, very short on intelligent answers, a cunningly scholastic theory was evolved: *American directors are liars*. The idea was, you see, that Hawks and Walsh and whoever could, *if they so wished*, come back with responses more than commensurate with the questions posed them; but, and here is the sheer paranoid splendour of the hypothesis, they *chose* to represent themselves—even to 'the French'!—as uncomplicated entertainers one and all.

The British were less Jesuitical, more naive and maybe more honest. In the first issue of *Movie*, Minnelli was interviewed about *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, an interview printed in the margin of a brief extract from the shooting script. At one point in the movie, Glenn Ford, as the scion of a rich Argentine family whose loyalties are divided by World War II, cradles his dead father on the rainswept patio of their hacienda, then turns his eyes heavenwards to be confronted with the eponymous Horsemen cantering across a lurid MGM sky. 'Why does the camera go up now?' *Movie* asked Minnelli. 'Because he's watching the sky,' Minnelli answered.

This exchange, not the only one of its kind in the interview, devastated the critical fraternity. In the *Financial Times* Derek Hill jeered at the whole magazine as a practical joke in the worst possible taste. Critics would meet in Wardour Street; and somebody would ask, as if it were the one about the chicken crossing the road, 'Why does the camera go up?', and somebody else would reply, 'Because he's watching the sky!'; and they'd fall about, the tears coursing down their cheeks. *Movie* countered by listing a number of imaginable (if not so *simon-pure*) alternative motivations behind such a camera movement—Emotional: Ford cowering before the vision; Symbolic: Ford being held in judgment by it; Bravura, and so on—before concluding that the attractive diffidence of Minnelli's answer only confirmed what they had always suspected about his methods. It seems not to have occurred to them that Minnelli might have directed Glenn Ford to look up *specifically* to accommodate these same rhetorical flourishes (all of which, incidentally, are there in the scene for anyone to see). But then, like most of the cinephilic race, the *Movie* brats had a producer's cast of mind. Ideas were anathema to them. A mere idea would have smudged the smooth transparent sheen of so



On the Beach.

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'Because he's watching the sky!'

idiotically perfect an artefact as *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*. Only when they were fashioned out of a hundred per cent genuine sow's ear, not out of silk, was the magazine interested in silk purses. (Minnelli, of course, could make a Gucci bag out of a sow's ear, and usually did.)

Professionalism!—that became the watchword. Nothing too pretentious. Nothing too artistic. 'The camera at the height of a man's eye.' Listen to them. On *Hatari!*: 'With more animals than any other movie and a score by Henry Mancini, the mixture, as before, is irresistible.' This is radical criticism? On Leo McCarey's *The Devil Never Sleeps*: 'The tears of melodrama (on the verge of tragedy because Siu-lan becomes pregnant) turn into belly laughs.' Never mind the unfortunate proximity of *pregnant* and *belly laughs*, whose definition of tragedy is this? 'The sense of the endless struggle in *Man's Favorite Sport?* has something of the dignity of the great symbolic fishing stories *Moby Dick* and *The Old Man and the Sea*.' Uh huh. On Howard Hawks (whom, if he had not existed, auteurism would have had to invent): 'Everything that can be said in presenting Hawks boils down to one simple statement: here is a man.' I kid you not.

Professionalism, anti-intellectualism... dignity. For *Movie*, a film-maker was practically a Hawksian character, a man of action who prized values above ideas, and who if possible should sport a black eye-patch like the Demon King.

Am I being unfairly selective? Flushing out dizzy one-off aberrations? Not really: for even in what must have been more considered, semi-theoretical statements there could be detected a fixation on some 'classical' limpidity of style and texture. This, for example, from Ian Cameron's leader article in the first issue: '...we are not saying, though it is a

tenable position, that a director is obliged to show us everything all the time...' Italics mine.

The sad truth was that the British auteurs had imported the glorious *politique* duty-free, so to speak, omitting to pay their dues to film history. What in Paris had been primarily a manoeuvre to revitalise a moribund national cinema was jellified into a dewy-eyed reactionary nostalgia for Hollywood's battery farm—(on Richard Fleischer's *Barabbas*, a pseudo-Biblical blockbuster: 'Perhaps Fleischer had *too much freedom*...')—which, if you believed them, was alone capable of laying boxfuls of golden eggs, stamped with Leo the Lion. Ignoring the fact that it was in opposition to Delannoy and Decoin that the original Hitchcock-Hawksians had enshrined their idols in auteurdom, Ian Cameron could write in *Movie* 5: 'Whereas critics mainly find themselves liking either Hawks or Eisenstein, Hitchcock or Dovzhenko, Mizoguchi commands universal admiration,' without anywhere spelling out why Hawks and Eisenstein, etc, must remain mutually exclusive, or indeed why Mizoguchi should dispose of such 'universal' favour.

Sadder still, though, they began trumpeting the virtues of a populo-industrial ideology at a period when Hollywood was hatching out deeply unpopular, so-called 'popular movies', audience art for which there no longer existed much of an audience. But what did balance sheets matter when you could be on cute first-name, not to mention nickname, terms with a few of Toytown's prominent senior citizens: 'Sam' Fuller, 'Nick' Ray? (As if critics of American literature or music would ever refer to Wally Stevens or Charlie—no, *Chuck* Ives.)

The most candid disclosure of auteurist fantasising was not to be found in *Movie* at all but in the looniest of its litter, the *Brighton Film Review*. (It later

re-baptised itself *Monogram*.) This was the magazine that dropped its xxxx rating ('one of the twenty best films in the history of the cinema') when the quota had come embarrassingly close to being filled after only three issues or so. In any event, in its first issue under the *Monogram* banner, it published a genuine manifesto for the Auteur Theory, so pure, so poignant, it is worth quoting from at some length:

What we are insisting on is that the cinema, in spite of its comparative youth and novelty, does have a tradition, and that this tradition is to a large part constituted by the American cinema. (...) For we believe that the cinema of the future can hardly be the major form of artistic and social expression (a position which it is undoubtedly capable of) without being to some extent comprehensible within this tradition, which is not even primarily one of how films are made but a simple fact of cinematic consumption, of what kind of films we have been brought up on. This may sound reactionary, but isn't: to ignore the American cinema is aesthetically as harmful and potentially damaging as consciously repressing childhood experiences because one cannot come to terms with them: both acts are likely to lead to psychoses and obsessive private fantasies. A healthy attitude, on the other hand, doesn't mean one has to re-enact these experiences ad infinitum.

There. What is this but the classic discourse on masturbation of a Spock-reared parent? It is telling us to give no heed to all those old wives' tales about overindulgence in Hollywood movies causing us to go blind or become sexually impotent; that, on the contrary, blindness and impotence and other undreamt-of horrors may be the consequence of our repressing such aboriginal urges; and so, if we have a mind to it, we just should go see *Rio Bravo* for the eighth or ninth time, cleansing our psyches of unhealthy obsessive fantasies.

Movie's approach was comparably backward-glancing, sterile and onanistic. Naturally, it erected a Pantheon—in those days everybody had to have a private Pantheon in his backyard, like the private chapel at Brideshead. Sarris had been the first to build, and his had separate graded niches to which he gave labels like 'The Far Side of Paradise' or 'Strained Seriousness' or 'Less Than Meets the Eye' (a phrase that applied to the whole exercise).

But, once having honoured its heroes, *Movie* could only go on celebrating them in issue after issue. And with Hitchcock, Hawks, Minnelli, Preminger, Ray, Brooks, Tashlin and Aldrich all but monopolising the magazine's sleek pages, there was little room for the still-to-be-consecrated film-maker. In their occult Yellow Book period, the critics of *Cahiers du Cinéma* had none the less managed to discover a marvellous new generation

of directors: themselves. *Movie* discovered Clive Donner and Seth Holt and had a kind word for John Guillermin. As incontrovertible proof that worthwhile movies *could* get made in Britain, however, by Americans at least, Ian Cameron cited these titles: *The Devil Never Sleeps*, *The Angry Hills* (Aldrich), *Land of the Pharaohs* (Hawks), *The Savage Innocents* (Ray) and *Harry Black* (Hugo Fregonese—Very Talented in *Movie*'s own sub-let of a Pantheon and therefore way out in front of Cassavetes, Curtiz, Dwan, Huston, King, Kubrick, Milestone, Wellman, Wilder and Wyler). He went on: 'We know we can't have a *L'Avventura* or an *A Bout de Souffle* under the present system. We are much more disturbed by the fact that we are not getting equivalents for *Psycho*, *Elmer Gantry* and *Written on the Wind*.' Who knows, *Movie* may yet gratefully endorse the Campari School of British filmmaking—Alan Parker, Ridley Scott, Hugh Hudson.

In the short term, the auteurs' influence on mainstream criticism was negligible. In *The Times*, for example, Our Film Critic seemed to enjoy *Advise and Consent*, yet, perhaps jaundiced by his own anonymity, he made but a single reference to its maker: the movie, he announced in his opening paragraph, 'was directed by Otto Preminger'. Ditto: Alan Dent in the *Sunday Telegraph*. John Coleman spoke of 'Otto Preminger's new big smoothie' and referred in passing to *Movie*'s championship of him. None of them made the slightest allusion to Otto's *mise en scène*. Reviewing *The Courtship of Eddie's Father* in the *Observer*, Penelope Gilliatt advocated that Milton Krasner, its director of photography, 'should have his paint-box taken away from him', as if the paint-box were exclusively Krasner's, not Minnelli's. On *Hatari!*, John Coleman again cited *Movie*, 'never backward in seeming forward.' Coleman went on to challenge the notion of Hawks as a neglected director, adding that he 'has made his predictable quota of bad, not to say downright lousy, films,' an appraisal that revealed beyond any doubt that here was somebody who had not yet *seen the light*. (He never did.) As for Our Film Critic, he confined himself as usual to the *degré zéro* of auteurist exegesis—'*Hatari!*, directed by Mr Howard Hawks...' ('Mr' was *The Times*' way of saying *here is a man*)—and left it at that. The popular press, of course, had no truck with directors' names. For them, it still appeared as if movies were brought by the stork or abandoned in cabbage patches.

Yet a debased form of auteurism has indeed become a critical commonplace, to the point where it strikes no one as strange that a director's 'recurring' themes should be laid out for dissection from practically his first film—a seismic lurch in attitudes that can be attributed only very indirectly to the efforts of critics. No, it was the film-makers



'Just that unlikely weapon.'

themselves, the real *Movie* Brats, the ciné-literates (the implication being that the innocent chumps they so venerated were illiterate), who consciously and sometimes self-consciously made the kind of multilayered genre movies Hawks and Ford and Walsh once made unconsciously, the tyros in diapers who replaced the tyrants in jodhpurs, it was *they* who, affluent in movie lore and strategies and generationally incurious about anything circumscribed by a medium as passé as print, catapulted Hollywood into the age of the director's cinema, of the Compleat Auteur.

The auteurs did have an influence, but it was hazier, more diffuse, more sentimental. Its effect, though, was powerful on at least one of three *truly* influential areas of current British film criticism. And it is now the moment, before that Civil War between auteurs and structuralists, Cavaliers and Roundheads, dedicated respectively to upholding and dethroning the King, or Author, to consider them.

The Baby Boom

When *Time Out* was launched by its present publisher, Tony Elliott, in 1968, it was not much more than a pamphlet. It listed cinemas, theatres, rock concerts, sports events, 'alternative' nightlife and poetry readings, without the surplus value of critical comment or editorial

copy of any kind. It was not an instantaneous success, but eventually became a massive one; and catering to the same growth market as the independently run cinemas which were soon to dot gentrified suburbs of London, it itself began to grow. It grew and it grew. It turned into a magazine you would read, not merely consult. Till, as we know, the bandwagon was uncoupled in 1981 when a protracted strike over staffing, administrative and editorial policies led to more than half the staff breaking away to found *City Limits*, an alternative to the alternative, as well as to the appearance on the scene of a second competitor, *Event*. (And from here on, I shall be using *Time Out* as a generic term to encompass all three.)

The influence of *Time Out* on London's movie-going patterns (a statistic which the Screens, the Gates, the Camden Plaza, the Scala, the Electric, etc, discovered to their chagrin during its absence) derives, I think, from two factors. (1) Its critics are virtually of the same age as its readers and so are agreeable to donning (mentally) the short pants necessary for an appreciation of such regular circuit provender as science fiction, horror and what to an unsympathetic eye look like live-action Roadrunner movies. (2) Theirs is a generation weaned on auteurism, they take it for granted, applying it industriously to their contemporaries among Hollywood filmmakers: the Carpenters, Cronenbergs, Demmes, Lynchs, and so forth.

But this is, as I say, a commonplace now. The difference is that *Movie*'s bewitchment with things Hollywood has waxed into an obsession with everything American. For the *Time Out* critic seems to know just about all there is to know about the history and geography of the United States, about Harlem underworld politics, West Coast surfing terminology,

CB vigilantes, the struggles of the Wobblies and the Johnson County Wars. He is someone who takes the Death of the American West personally. He never says *Vietnam*, he says *'Nam* (the very feistiest will even dispense with the apostrophe), as if it were his right as a Vietnam vet movie veteran. Though often hostile to anything savouring of 'the Fine Arts', he has become a casual expert in the work of Edward Hopper and Andrew Wyeth (whose canvases resemble movie stills) and of Raymond Chandler and James M. Cain (whose novels read like movie scripts).

While some of us still find terms like *hang-up* and *spaced out* sitting improbably on our tongues, they can toss off *Chicano* and *double whammy* and *Tex-Mex* and *good ole boys* with cool nonchalance. The shrill polyphony of much of their writing—Tony Richardson's *The Border* has Jack Nicholson 'moodily scratching his conscience as a *migra* patrolman regretfully staking obsessively consumerist wife Valerie Perrine...'—and the indiscriminate ooze of enthusiasm—*Raiders of the Lost Ark* is 'every movie you've ever seen—minus the boring bits...'—make them sound more like deejays than film critics. Or emjays: movie-jockeys. And as such, what more fitting than that they adopt a real Hi-there-guys-and-gals! transatlantic twang? Here is *Time Out* on *Once Upon a Time in the West*: 'After fourteen viewings, objectivity is out; we're talking favourite films here, so only superlatives will do.' How that British *u* in *favourite* must have chafed!

Middlebrow

Champion

of Great

Britain

Alexander Walker is the film critic of the *Standard*, formerly the *Evening Standard* and London's sole remaining evening newspaper. So his power base is a secure one, a claim which can be substantiated Thursdays between 5 and 7 pm in the Tube where—*O freelance, eat your heart out!*—row after row of commuters have just read, are reading, or are just about to read, his weekly column. Nor does Walker possess the kind of soul to shrink from such power, power which he more directly exerts upon the city's distributors and exhibitors. Press shows have been delayed a few minutes if 'Alex' is held up in traffic, luckless cigarette smokers have been asked on occasion to

change seats should a will o' the wisp from the unspeakable weed risk obscuring his view of the screen. (Walker *emphatically* does not smoke. You might even say, considering his dogged strafing—even in his column—of those who do, that he is an addicted non-smoker.)

Anyone in Walker's position, obviously, is going to have some kind of influence. The question is: how much of that influence is *his* and how much the *Standard's*; and, also, what has he made of it? Well—he's for Stanley Kubrick and against Ken Russell. When Russell announced his intention to film the life of Gustav Mahler, Walker sounded a furious clarion call. 'Bring an elephant-gun!' he cried. Whereupon, the movie's producer, David Puttnam, took him at his word and laid just that unlikely weapon before him in a Soho restaurant. He has written more books about the cinema than any other British newspaper columnist. He has been an unflagging castigator of what he perceives as the left-wing bias of the *Monthly Film Bulletin*. He sneered at its contributors as 'mutants' and took one of them to task for writing a negative review of a film which he, Walker, did not deny was 'meretricious' but whose director, Jules Dassin, he just happened to have interviewed on the stage of the National Film Theatre. (The MFB is far from alone in keeping In, Out and Walker correspondence trays, however.)

Walker has fought a fierce running battle against every kind of censorship. Organised an NFT season of Right-Wing Films, the very idea of which got up a lot of people's noses. In the Autumn 1981 issue of SIGHT AND SOUND, 'Quincannon' defined Walker as 'a combative libertarian conservative' whose 'critical appraisals are rarely influenced by his political views.' That would be strange and dismaying if it were true, but it isn't, of course. Walker said as much to an interviewer from *Isis*: 'I do admit to a bias in my film criticism. The bias is me.' The problem arises when that bias risks obscuring his view like a wisp of cigarette smoke hovering stubbornly in midair. In a piece on *Looks and Smiles* that was laudatory overall, describing the experience of one of the film's characters when in service with the British Army in Ireland, he wrote of 'the neo-Fascism which Ken Loach pretends to see in a khaki uniform.' Now, it can always be argued that Loach erred in his indictment of the military, but it was a case he was entitled to make, and the word 'pretends' is cant.

However, to come to the point of what must appear like a premature obituary of the man: Walker is not only a sometimes perspicacious, sometimes infuriating critic of the middle ground, by far the best writing for a non-'quality' newspaper. Spurred on by a *passion* (not merely enthusiasm) for the cinema that he shares with contributors to the more radical specialised journals but with few of his own Fleet Street colleagues, he is, in his fashion, a catalyst. A sniper. A

mischievous-maker. A St Simon Stylites squatting atop his weekly column. The Enoch Powell of film criticism, perhaps—and perhaps too, like Powell, *waiting for the call*.

As such, he is necessary and... irreplaceable. Though I doubt seriously he will see it in this light, this is a defence of Alexander Walker.

The

Box

Populi

I once made rather a hash of interviewing in public a celebrated Italian director, since when I have had a deep admiration for anyone blessed with the verbal agility to put such a performance over without sweat. The fact that there are now scores of them chattering away on the TV screen like budgerigars in a pet shop window is only the more galling. Best of all, though, is Barry Norman, the former anchorman of BBC's *Film 80, 81*, etc. With the somewhat grisly facundity of an insurance salesman, Norman buzzes through his assortment of information and opinions at such a speed as to put singers of Gilbertian patter songs to shame. In fact, there is a sing-song cadence to his voice that alerts you, with amazing accuracy, well before he has reached his first subordinate clause, to whether the movie in question is about to be praised or damned. As a trick, this is kin to that used by broadcasters whose job is to recite football results: 'Tottenham Hot-spurs 2...'—(the voice dipping in a kind of half-conscious resignation)—'*Chelsea*...' and, without waiting to hear the rest, you just know the match was a draw.

Norman almost never goes out on a limb. On the rare occasions he does, you may be sure it's a sturdy little bough on which a good number of his confrères are also perched: e.g. his choice of Peter Yates' *Breaking Away* as one of the best movies of the year, long after its ' sleeper' status had been established. His is the voice of the *doxa*, of orthodoxy. The viewer's own blurry notions of a new movie, notions founded mainly on its poster, advance publicity and cast, are smoothed out, squeezed into tight, well-balanced and nearly witty sentences, then played back to him as full-grown opinions. Norman has quit the critics' compound (if he was ever part of it), with their pretensions to advise and recommend and deter if necessary, he has quit all that to become a talking head on the box, or rather a talking potter's wheel, not really advising or recommending or deterring, but reassuring his public, filling them in, *telling them what they are*

missing—and given those rockabye insurance salesman cadences, it never sounds as if they're missing much, anyway, good or bad. He is a preacher to the unconverted and the unconvertible. Why bother seeing a film, after all, when Barry Norman can relieve you of that tedious obligation, seeing it for you, dicing it and masticating it till it is pap for the toothless and regurgitating it for the benefit of all you scrawny little fledglings, open-beaked and eager inside the global nest of your living-rooms? *Film 80*, etc, is a *Reader's Digest* for the McLuhanite era.

Signifier and Signified

The above Jane Austenish rubric whisks us back to that longed-for moment when, like Georgie Minafer, the *Movie* brats finally got their comeuppance. *The Magnificent Ambiguities!* Suddenly the auteurs with their Hitchcockian ambiguities and their Hawksian dignity and their sense of tradition found themselves outflanked by a group positioned further on the Left than they had been on the Right, i.e. further from the Centre, from SIGHT AND SOUND. The structuralists!—there was a term to send a chill shiver down the spinal cord. Structuralism!—a bulbous green reptilian H. R. Giger-designed alien erupting from the pudgy soft belly of British film criticism.

Movie has actually managed to return for a handful of valedictory issues, but they seem back numbers even as they are published. Gone are all the old elegance and fizz: with its smaller, cramped format, the magazine appears to have shrunk. In a round-table session (*Movie* 20, Spring 1975), the participants sounded dazed, groggy, as though they still didn't realise what had hit them. They were like a political party whose candidate, the Auteur, had just lost his deposit. The game was over. Only Robin Wood, a relatively late arrival but a commanding figure, showed any disposition to leave the door ever so slightly ajar on the future. 'If the findings of semiology ever manage to be expressed in intelligible English, they might eventually prove of interest,' he said.

Eventually, as it turned out, was 1980, when Wood wrote in *Film Comment*:

British film criticism since the 60s has been dominated by two opposed camps: the 'liberal' Establishment, represented at its most intellectually respectable by SIGHT AND SOUND, at its most complacent and pusillanimous by the ever-changing yet eternally unchangeable procession of

journalist reviewers, dominant by sheer force of inertia; and the Marxist-structuralist movement centred on *Screen*, dominant by its activeness, its self-assertion, its high level of organisation and coherence.

Well, what a lot somebody had learned in just five years!—though whether it was Wood or the structuralists is hard to say. He continued, in his mentor's hectoring, take-it-or-Leavis manner: 'Any criticism that fails to take into account (however critically) the major advances of the last twenty years foredooms itself to triviality and instant obsolescence.' (Since he seems to be alluding not to auteurism but to structuralism, so much for ninety-five per cent of Wood's own published output.)

In fact, *Screen*, the house journal of the Society for Education in Film and Television, has differed little in quality from other serious film magazines. It has published some interesting pieces (notably Stephen Heath's microscopic study of *Touch of Evil*) and a number of poor, even unreadable ones. The snag is that just hoping to read *Screen*, let alone write for it, is like aspiring to become a concert pianist or tennis champion—you would have to have got into training a long time ago. It was all so horribly unfair. You had dutifully ploughed through your Pudovkin & Balazs & Kracauer & Agee & Bazin & Manny Farber & Sarris, why, you'd even begun to see the light, when a whole new Pantheon reared up overnight, a Pantheon whose gods were for the most part total strangers: Barthes, Derrida, Propp, Lévi-Strauss, Eco, Foucault, Lacan, Todorov, Althusser. When was one supposed to have had the time?

But while the liberal Establishment went back into the bunkers muttering 'spuriouseur and spuriouseur', a few long-suffering 'combative libertarians' this time stood their ground. They were resolved to draw the line at structuralism. This was more than just the usual anti-intellectual bleat, the unspeakable in full pursuit of the unreadable, as you might say. For example, there was Paul Rotha, who interestingly recalled how 'this phoney "semiotic" jargon in film criticism was actually exposed first with devastating brilliance' back in 1937 by Otis Ferguson. (Well, whatever it was that Ferguson exposed in 1937, it was unquestionably phoney as semiotics.) And there was Alexander Walker, in his element, his complaint being, as nearly as I can make out, that semiotics was to blame for the BFI library closing its doors to the public on Mondays. But these were merely the preliminary bouts. The main event was a pair of articles by the film-makers Kevin Brownlow and Lindsay Anderson.

Brownlow's piece, 'Cinematic Theology', was published in the *New Statesman* in January 1980. Its premise was that teaching—of film or whatever—is, or should be, a form of communication and that the Byzantine gobbledygook

called for by the semiological approach erects a barrier to such communication. Brownlow is being a wee bit disingenuous when he equates teaching with communication of the one-to-one, How-d'ye-do brand. Education has always depended upon the student being willing to learn, which has traditionally meant being willing to expand his vocabulary, and on the teacher being a good deal more knowledgeable than he. Brownlow regards this situation as fascistic, however: 'For it is a kind of fascism to force people practising one discipline to learn the language of another.' Film should be film, according to him, unsullied by contact with any foreign bodies.

Though he owns to a failure to 'understand semiology', Brownlow none the less evaluates it as 'unhelpful—to the point of arrogance'—which is like barging into an unlighted room on the assumption that it must be bare of furniture, since you can't see any. First thing you know, you'll have pitched into the Eames chair.

'Would you prefer a series of courses on Christian Metz, with diagrams,' he asks rhetorically in his closing paragraph ('with diagrams'—*quelle horreur!*), 'or another film by Bill Douglas?' Never mind that for some of us the answer to that question is by no means a foregone conclusion, the notion that, just by existing, Metz could somehow—fascistically—jeopardise Douglas' hopes of pursuing his career is so much emotional flim-flam, as Brownlow must have been aware when he set it forth.

A year later, in the *Guardian*, Lindsay Anderson, sounding like a character played by the late Arthur Lowe in one of his own satirical films, waded in with the same arguments more or less, albeit more biliously worded. Bile was his contribution to the debate.

Anderson's aversion to any critical method requiring more than individual taste and discernment is patent enough—he cites the standard literary-humanist doctrine on the aims of criticism, i.e. 'to discover and explore the relevance of art to experience', as though it were an eternal verity (let him try applying it to the sonata form or one of Malevich's 'White on White' paintings)—but he goes further in seeming to question the value of all university Film Studies departments, of all lectureships in film, as well as of 'the maintenance, far beyond public use or demand, of subsidised magazines like SIGHT AND SOUND and *Screen*.' In fact, he could not have got it more hopelessly turned around. Departments of Film Studies are booming everywhere, it almost seems as if more books about the cinema are being published annually than movies are being made, even SIGHT AND SOUND and *Screen* are doing nicely. Rather, it is the movies themselves that appear to be responding to meagre 'public use or demand', selling as they are like yesterday's hot-cakes. Since, in the middle of the afternoon, every weekday (except for Monday, of course), you will find more movie

enthusiasts in the BFI library than in a West End cinema, it might have made better sense if Anderson's giant can of 'pseudo' pest repellent (which he is seen brandishing in the caricature accompanying the article) had been directed against film-makers instead of film students.

Structuralism actually enjoyed a public airing in February 1981, when Colin MacCabe, a Fellow of King's College, Cambridge, the author of an exquisitely slim treatise on Godard and a self-confessed 'post-structuralist', was refused upgrading from his contract post as assistant lecturer in English to a tenured one as full lecturer. It was like a scene from King Vidor and Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead*, where what you would imagine would be a purely academic interest in the sectarian battles of architects Gary Cooper and Kent Smith over such things as cornices, capitals and pediments is whipped up by the media to foaming fever pitch nationwide. For architecture to arouse such passions, you think as you watch the movie, it's preposterous—but *structuralism!* MacCabe was finally banished to Strathclyde, a spot viewed from Cambridge as a kind of Hibernian Eboli, but not before every newspaper in the country, like that published from Raymond Massey's penthouse suite in the Vidor movie, had dispatched its ace theorist to uncover just what the heresy might be that had nearly defiled one of the twin Vatican's of English learning. Yet twelve months later, practically to the day, 'Atticus' in the *Sunday Times*, marking the *affaire's* first anniversary, made this jovial and timely aside to the reader: 'You have forgotten what structuralism is, haven't you? So have I. Let's pretend we know, shall we?'

That moveable feast of petits-fours that is the cocktail-party circuit had moved on. But, if the truth be told, it never had been much more than a matter of *let's pretend*. Relatively few of the dissenters, by their own admission, had got close enough to structuralism or semiotics or semiology (the terms are synonymous, though the first is a slight misnomer) to judge it on a base other than that of prejudice. It was its bristly, cactussy surface which repelled them. And there, to be sure, they did have a point. Brownlow quoted a juicy specimen from *Screen*:

The eviction of Peter Pan as prime signifier from his film text does not therefore take place through a meta-cinematic process, nor through that element of the syntagmatic code which precisely designates presence as absence (the insert), but through a narrative continuum (growth) whose consecutive temporal logic in itself constitutes a negation of Peter Pan's semantic content (the boy who would not grow up).

A passage like that would make anyone nervous about growing up.

Even more unashamed are the movement's fellow travellers, who get their

thrills from jangling the small change of its lexicon. There are those who set about 'subverting' the 'credibility' of 'conventional language', for 'example', by festooning key words with sweet little flights of quotation marks like Peter Scott geese over the mantelpiece. Some who try to enlarge/refine the significance/resonance generated by their *écriture* by splitting every other word with a virgule/slash mark. And still others, the most chaotic, who use *text* just as if it meant text. A little structuralism is a dangerous thing.

One can't help wondering, though. Wondering—since no one has as yet been bodily coerced into reading either Christian Metz or *Screen*, and since their influence on mainstream criticism is nil—why such a rarefied, near-monastic school has come under fire at all. Obviously, the manner in which structuralism denies the primacy of the artist as 'creator', the person best placed to authenticate the meaning of his work, and its counter-proposal that it is language itself—here, a language of visual signs—that lends articulate shape to the flux of perception, would explain why film-makers like Brownlow and Anderson might feel so threatened.

But it goes deeper than that. Britain's

dominant cultural tradition is still the nineteenth century one of *realism*, a word whose dubiously alien suffix, *ism*, is neutralised by the dazzling candour of *the real*. In this context, however, realism not only functions as a repository of moral values—because of its 'relevance to experience', remember—it constitutes, for the artist, an incentive to *imitate*. Worthwhile art is art that imitates life, that 'do the police in many voices', to the point where a movie like *Quest for Fire* can be acclaimed for its *realistic* depiction of the Stone Age. And worthwhile criticism, so the argument runs on, is criticism that imitates art. Simplifying grossly, a review of a comedy ought to make you laugh or at least chuckle, a review of *Kramer vs Kramer*, say, ideally ought to be read with a box of Kleenex in your lap. Style (or stylishness) is an optional extra, perfectly admissible so long as it does not compromise *the real*, but complexities of form or method are as noxious as additives. Still, structuralist critics do have their use, for someone is needed to review structuralist movies, right? Right. Meanwhile, *the real* is elsewhere, holding aloft its crystal-clear beaker of moral values at the (Platonic) intersection of Wardour and Fleet.

The Log of the Titanic

I wish I were a Vicky or a Low and knew how to draw a marvellous charcoal cartoon of the sinking of the *Titanic*, except that where the name TITANIC ought to be I would pencil in the words FALLING CINEMA ATTENDANCES; and on the iceberg, or rather the tip of the iceberg, the word VIDEO; on the waves, in wavy lettering, maybe the word APATHY; and bobbing above the waves would be half-a-dozen lifeboats, no more than half-filled, in which the 'first-class' critics (with graphic likenesses here of David Robinson, Alan Brien, Derek Malcolm, Philip French, John Coleman, Nigel Andrews, *et al*) would be scribbling away at their reviews of the catastrophe as if it were an Irwin Allen disaster movie and only interrupting their labours to chop off the fingers of the hapless, steerage-class freelances, knuckles showing white in their efforts to clamber to safety.

If television has indeed killed cinema attendances in this country, the dying has been a slow and messy one, and it will be left to the box's own Nemesis, video (as well as satellite and cable, the as yet submerged portion of the iceberg), to deliver the *coup de grâce*. To be sure, movies will continue to be theatrically

premiered, for, as David Puttnam noted, video is likely to remain dependent upon the publicity and prestige obtained through a West End opening. That means, however, that the principal function of any commercial run will be to *trailer* the movie—if they're not careful, the critics will find themselves reviewing what basically are promotional exhibits for video sales and rentals. And they can but pray that, for an enlightened class of London audience, actual attendance at a cinema will one day acquire the *cachet* of—oddly—a *live* performance.

Oh, the change will be gradual, never fear. Peter Noble, that chronic sufferer from jet set lag, will continue to ask, 'So what else is new?' and Marjorie Bilbow will continue to rate as 'good value for action regulars' or 'excellent in popular venues as the word of mouth gets around' such turkeys as would have a problem to fill a family-sized Habitat divan and the popular press will continue to be innocent of the facts of life and the auteurs will discover Charles Marquis Warren and the structuralists will be outflanked on the Right by the neo-auteurs and SIGHT AND SOUND will celebrate its centenary and the 'quality' critics will frankly come to resemble *belles-lettristes*, penning whimsical essays on the latest releases as, fifty years ago, they might have written about the Adventures of a Farthing or A Stroll in the Strand, but even they will continue to lumber enthusiastically out of their seats as the movie ends and the cinema curtains superpose their own embrace over the fade-out kiss and the words THE END are just visible beneath their satiny ripple, as though writ on water.



Bob Geldof in 'Pink Floyd: The Wall', directed by Alan Parker.

BRITISH FILM PRODUCTION 1981

What did the films made last year in Britain cost? Who made them? How long did it take to get them into production? How have they been received? This comprehensive survey answers these and other questions.

The year 1981 was the worst ever for British film production; 1980 had mustered a meagre crop of thirty-eight features, but this survey shows a mere twenty-seven films, which covers all the features produced in Britain last year, save one. The exception is *Coming Out of the Ice*, made in Britain and Finland for CBS Television and theatrical release abroad. This slipped through the mesh of my research; which did not, it should be added, cover the low-budget exploitation films which are regularly churned out for specialist cinemas.

A first glance at the survey indicates that there is nothing new: a handful of large-budget American films were made in British studios, while the majority of British films were low-budget, mainly independent ventures. Further study, however, reveals some interesting features. Much has been written lately about the cowardice of British financiers, specifically and rightly criticised for not financing *Chariots of Fire*, yet there was non-industry British money in seven of the twenty British-financed films, a reasonable 35 per cent. Goldcrest Film

Investors were the largest non-industry backers, with their heavy involvement in *Gandhi* as well as their partial funding of *Enigma* and *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman*. The British banks, not too often involved in film and even less in British film, invested in *Pink Floyd: The Wall* and the National Coal Board Pension Fund broke new ground with their backing of *The Appointment*. The other non-industry backers were smaller: Amnesty funded *The Secret Policeman's Other Ball* and the group Madness and its record company funded *Take It or Leave It*.

'When I started trying to raise money for films,' producer Timothy Burrill said, 'there were only eight or nine sources, including the UK and American majors. Now there are unlimited doors to knock on, private financiers, etc. This of course has made our lives both easier and harder.'

'It never ceases to amaze me how films do get made, but somehow the money does appear,' said Clive Parsons, the co-producer with Davina Belling of Lindsay Anderson's *Britannia Hospital*, which was co-funded by EMI and the National Film Finance Corporation. EMI financed only one other British film in 1981, the fourth of the lavish Agatha Christie series, *Evil Under the Sun*. (The fact that producer Richard Goodwin has described it as third in the series—it is the third featuring Poirot—perhaps indicates a desire to sweep the unfortunate *The Mirror Crack'd* under a carpet of oblivion.)

The remaining investment by the so-called British majors was hardly British. It was the Los Angeles branch of ITC that set up *Dark Crystal*, a fantasy peopled with sci-fi Muppets, and *The Great Muppet Caper*, both made by the American company of Jim Henson, despite being initiated by Lord Grade. It was ironic, commented Henson, that the ITC successes such as the Muppet films and *On Golden Pond* came at the end when it was too late. Henson was keen to express his gratitude for the support he

had always received from Lord Grade: 'the kind of creative freedom we had is very hard to find these days.' In the retrenched world of ACC, where discipline is becoming the key word, it is unlikely, whatever the success of *Dark Crystal*, that the company would again spend \$25 million on such a film. And it might be pointed out here that many producers feel it is unnecessary to spend so much on one film. 'Anachronistic' was how Simon Relph described it.

There was only one other film financed in Britain where a major was involved. This was *The Return of the Soldier*, where Brent Walker stepped in when the money, originally put up by an American dentist, ran out. The problems (and legal tussles) that surround funding of this film still continue, but Simon Relph, the co-producer with Ann Skinner, was relieved that it was able to be finished. 'Brent Walker came impressively to our rescue at a time when many wouldn't.' He added that George Walker drove a hard bargain but thought he was rather proud of that fact. *The Return of the Soldier*, like so many independent British films, took literally years to set up. It 'met with universal approval as a package,' said Relph, but despite liking the stars and saying how cheap it was they would not back his venture. He met equally unresponsive attitudes when the orthodontic finance collapsed midway through shooting and they were seeking a new backer. 'We were only looking for \$1 million and they all looked at the film, they all liked it but it wasn't the kind of thing they were giving advances for.' Today Relph believes that with a couple of notable exceptions (such as Handmade Pictures, for whom he is currently making *Privates on Parade*), 'the only hope we have of getting an indigenous product is Channel 4.'

Channel 4 financed three films in 1981, of which two, *Remembrance* and *Angel*, have already been seen in cinemas. With the BFI, they have co-financed another three. The BFI Production Board's 1981 films were its most ambitious

projects yet. If the NFFC can be described as a 'minor major'—and with its co-production of *Britannia Hospital* and *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman*, it continues to back the kind of original, imaginative work that is otherwise ignored—the BFI can certainly be described as a major minor. Despite the relatively low budgets of the three BFI films, *The Draughtsman's Contract*, *Ascendancy* and *Gold*, and the intellectual concern of all three, these films seem likely to provide the Institute with more commercial success than any previous ventures. Nevertheless, the Production Board still relies on the goodwill and commitment of all those involved, to an extent which Peter Sainsbury does not consider viable on a long-term basis. Sainsbury himself is a long-time advocate of a properly subsidised British cinema. 'British cinema will just become a service industry to foreign capital unless things change.'

SERVICE INDUSTRY

This spring, rejecting proposals put forward by those actively involved in the British film industry such as the Association of Independent Producers (AIP), and ensuring that any notion of a British Film Authority is as far away as ever, the Films Minister Sally Oppenheim reported to Parliament that studio bookings were up and that Americans were at last realising the cost-effectiveness of making films in Britain. Whatever the views of the present government and of the studios themselves, there can be few people in the film industry who regard American films being made in Britain as sufficient proof of an extant British film industry. If these were the only British films being made, the picture would be even gloomier than it is already.

In 1981 only six films were to a major part filmed in British studios: *Victor/Victoria* (100%) and *For Your Eyes Only* (75%) at Pinewood; *The Great Muppet Caper* (70%) and *Dark Crystal* (95%) at EMI Elstree; and *Brimstone and Treacle* (75%) and *The Pirates of Penzance* (100%) at Shepperton. In addition to these, *Britannia Hospital* was shot 50% at Lee Studios and *Pink Floyd: The Wall* was shot 40% at Pinewood. *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman* included 30% shooting at Bray and 35% of *An American Werewolf in London* was filmed at Twickenham.

This year is certainly busier for the studios with, at the time of writing, *Yentl* at Lee, *Krull* and *Superman III* at Pinewood, *The Hunger* and *Privates on Parade* at Shepperton and *The Lords of Discipline* at Twickenham. Indeed most studios report solid bookings for the next eighteen months.

Those who care about indigenous British film production worry not so much



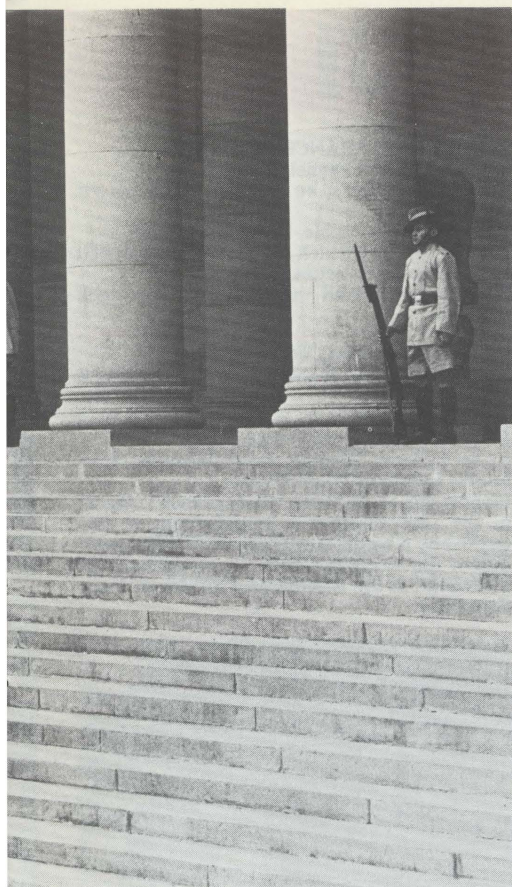
Ben Kingsley as Gandhi in Richard Attenborough's film.

about the number of American films coming to Britain as about the size of their budgets. The strong pound (in January 1981, it was a high 2.4 against the dollar, but by December had dropped to 1.9) kept many Americans away during 1981, though the majority of those who did film here indicate that they will return. *Octopussy*, the successor to *For Your Eyes Only* (the 1981 British box-office leader after *Superman II*), is already in production. This fact, while it pleases the studios, worries the producers. The 'inflation machine' of American majors shooting here causes considerable problems, said Clive Parsons, in that crews are so used to working on big US films that it spoils them for something that is local. For them the pay is rather reasonable, although Peter Beale, producing *Five Days One Summer*, considered that 'studios are charging too little; not enough money is coming back into studios.' Parsons, like many other producers, however, is appalled at how prices have risen, which he largely attributes to the shooting in Britain of such films as *Star Wars*. Nevertheless, even this golden egg seems likely to crack. Tony Adams, who has been involved in making the Pink Panther films in Britain as well as producing *Victor/Victoria*, enjoys making films here. 'The crews are among the best in the world and the studios are terrific.' But he believes that as costs rise, the UK lure is becoming less and less. 'It's very sad—I can remember making huge savings working in British studios and now I can make a film in Los Angeles for about the same cost. Unions and studios are cutting their own throats.'

The problem, said Clive Parsons, is that there are really two industries. Omitting the largely American-financed films quoted above which were shot in British studios, there were only four films which cost anything like the US average of \$9½ million. These were the Ladd Company's *Five Days One Summer*, shot on location in Switzerland and Scotland, EMI's *Evil Under the Sun*, shot on location in Majorca, the Anglo-French co-production *Enigma*, filmed in France, and *Gandhi*, filmed in India. The remaining British-financed films were made at an average cost of £650,000. The low-budget British film is currently a thriving industry but, as Parsons points out, separate from the large, mostly American bankrolled business.

FUTURE HOPES

Gandhi is in every sense a phenomenon. It took Richard Attenborough over seventeen years to set up his film, and over the years it was turned down, as he says, 'by every single major film finance source throughout the world.' At some time or other Paramount, Fox, Warners and Rank all showed interest. Fox dropped out when Darryl Zanuck, who believed in the project, lost his position as president of the company; Paramount dropped out by insisting on Richard Burton in the title role; Warners were scared off the deal when Mrs Gandhi declared her Emergency, and Rank, who were among the first to show enthusiasm, offered no funding, although Sir John Davis gave Richard Attenborough £5,000



to continue to develop the project. This money was only to be repaid if the project was set up, and it was indeed repaid some years ago.

Attenborough never lost faith in his project and the film has been made despite the local uproar at the funding by the Indian National Film Development Corporation and some Indian anxiety that it would be a slur on Gandhi. The success of *Gandhi* is therefore crucial not only to Attenborough but to both the British and Indian film industries. In financial terms its fortunes are particularly significant. 'If *Gandhi* is a success,' said Attenborough, 'it might coincidentally be the spark which lights up the British film industry. If it were a flop not only would Goldcrest be in some difficulty but their ability to arrange similar financial investments for other films would be jeopardised.'

While the British funding of other similar large-scale and costly films rests in the balance of *Gandhi*'s commercial success, a new trend in financing smaller budget films may depend on the success of *The Appointment*. Written and directed by Lindsey Vickers and described as a 'contemporary, sophisticated supernatural story', *The Appointment* is being backed by the National Coal Board Pension Fund. The Coal Board, which had already invested some money in Goldcrest where the risk was spread over several titles (including *Gandhi*), welcomed an approach from Vickers and the opportunity to move into major film investment. The production company, First Principle Films, which now has as directors Lindsey Vickers, with Douglas Abbott and Lionel Anthony

as silent partners representing the National Coal Board, was set up and the £650,000 film went into production.

The film, which stars Edward Woodward, is intended for all markets worldwide; and, despite its description in the press as a television drama, it will, Vickers hopes, have a major theatrical release. Much will depend on how American distributors and television companies react to the production and the possible series that may develop from this pilot. Interest is already high, and if it does succeed in bringing a sizeable return from the US it could indeed set an important new trend in the financing of similar films and series.

CHANNEL 4 MINI-BOOM

Taking the various trends into account, it appears that British film today is not so much at the crossroads as travelling through a spaghetti junction. One of the most optimistic routes is the development of Channel 4 as a major film producer: 'the Channel 4 mini-boom' to use Mark Shivas' phrase.

Jeremy Isaacs, Chief Executive of the Fourth Channel, believes that it has a major advantage in that it does not have hardware and therefore operates 'in the margins of other people's creative capacity.' His objective is to make films that 'work on the television screen and what is left of our cinemas.' Channel 4's 1981 productions included *Remembrance*, which was released at London's Screen on the Hill; *Angel*, which he intends to give a British theatrical release after its success in Dublin, and *The Disappearance of Harry*. There will also be a cinema release for *The Draughtsman's Contract*, which is a Channel 4/BFI co-production.

There may be some difficulties along the way. Despite excellent reviews the public did not flock to *Remembrance*, which indicates to some producers that people will not go out to see a television film. 'I would doubt that production for television would be suitable for theatrical release,' commented Peter Beale. Isaacs, however, thinks it is far too early to make any judgments, and the director of *Remembrance*, Colin Gregg, is delighted by the experience. 'It was designed to get a theatrical release, I wanted it to look like a theatrical feature that would work on television.' Apart from its release coinciding with the first heat wave of 1982, there were several other reasons for the failure of *Remembrance* in the theatre. 'The title is wrong, the poster could be wrong, there were no stars and the director is unknown,' Gregg said. 'I've never had any desire to sell myself, but then my name wouldn't sell the film anyway.' But he is happy to work for television. 'There are so many compromises you have to make if you want to work in the

cinema. I don't think it's worth it. But it's sad if your work is not seen on the big screen. You see the depth of your work, it's what every film-maker really wants.'

It has long been acknowledged that most of the best low-budget British films are seen on television, and companies such as Euston Films and Southern Pictures have been active in gradually erasing the distinctions between television and film. Isaacs knows this, having been himself involved in the creative use of film for television, and says that Channel 4 wants to 'recognise the wealth of film-making talent in this country and give it a home.' He agrees that Channel 4 has arrived at a time when the situation is already changing.

In the past, one problem has been the television levy. Under this, an ITV contractor can write off production costs incurred by a subsidiary but only if the films are made to be broadcast in Britain, not if they have a theatrical release (they may, of course, be released in cinemas abroad). Partly because of this levy, many films which could have been extremely successful have been denied a cinema release. Isaacs cites *The Naked Civil Servant*, and its director Jack Gold agrees that it might have done marvellous business in cinemas. Another film by Gold, *The Sailor's Return*, was jointly funded by the NFFC and Thames Television but never succeeded in getting the cinema distribution it wanted before it was screened on television, although it was screened at several festivals including London and Cambridge. At the time of writing, a cinema release has finally been arranged and the film should go out later this year.

Jack Gold is one of many directors working in film, most of whose work happens to have been seen on the small screen. Films such as Peter Duffell's *Caught on a Train* and Gavin Millar's *Cream in My Coffee*, both with Peggy Ashcroft at her indomitable best, Ian McEwan's *The Imitation Game* directed by Richard Eyre, and *A Sense of Freedom* and *Just Another Saturday*, which won John MacKenzie the Prix Italia, are all films in every sense of the word. 'MacKenzie had made half a dozen really remarkable films before *The Long Good Friday*,' said Isaacs. Nevertheless, it was *The Long Good Friday* that made him known as a director. A problem has always been that television companies insist on calling their films plays. 'When I went to Granada in 1958, Sidney Bernstein wouldn't allow the word "film" to be uttered in the building,' said Isaacs. Channel 4, however, will be slotting the one-off films into a programme called *Film On 4*. While such films have been called plays, as Simon Perry points out, film is a visual medium and many of these television films emphasise visual

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SURVEY BRITISH FILMS 1981

EXP Executive Producer
P Producer
D Director
SC Screenwriter
PH Director of Photography
CR Critical Reception: up to expectations at this stage?
MP Market Performance
QI Questionnaire Information

AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON

(Lycanthrope Films for Universal)

EXP Jon Peters, Peter Guber; **P** George Folsey Jr; **D/SC** John Landis; **PH** Bob Paynter.

CAST David Naughton, Jenny Agutter, Griffin Dunne.

Lycanthropic horror comedy which travels from the Yorkshire Moors to London's Soho. Premiered in the US. **CR** 'Well received.' **MP** 'In the US it suffered from being released immediately after *The Howling* and *Wolfen*. In Australia it was No 1 film of the year and in Britain it has continued to do very well.' **QI** George Folsey (by phone).



ANGEL

(Irish Film Board and Channel 4)

EXP John Boorman; **D/SC** Neil Jordan; **PH** Chris Menges.

CAST Stephen Rea, Alan Devlin, Veronica Quilligan.

Thriller set in South Armagh which studies its environment as well as the unravelling of the plot.

Premiered in Ireland. **CR** 'Extremely good in Ireland and good internationally after the Cannes trade show.' **MP** 'Very good—two subsequent screenings were needed at Cannes and it is doing very well in Dublin though not so well in the country.' **QI** Neil Jordan (by phone).

THE APPOINTMENT

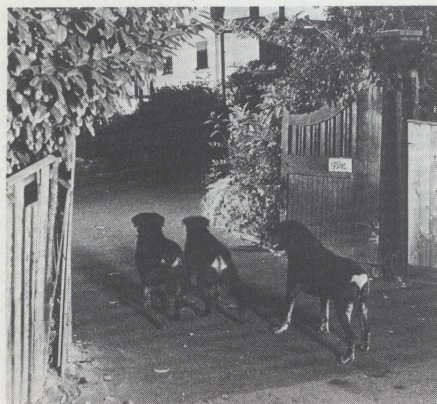
(First Principle Film Productions)

EXP Ken Julian; **P** Tom Sachs; **D/SC** Lindsey Vickers; **PH** Brian West.

CAST Edward Woodward, Jane Mellow, Samantha Wesson.

A supernatural thriller.

Will be premiered in the UK. **QI** Lindsey Vickers (by phone).



ASCENDANCY

(BFI Production Board)

EXP Peter Sainsbury; **P** Penny Clark; **D/SC** Edward Bennett; **PH** Clive Tickner.

CAST Julie Covington, Ian Charleson, John Phillips.

Ireland, 1920: A sheltered young woman's growing involvement with war.

Not yet known where it will premiere. **QI** Peter Sainsbury.

BAD BLOOD

(Southern Pictures in association with the New Zealand Film Commission)

EXP Mark Shivas, Al Burgess; **P/SC** Andrew Brown; **D** Mike Newell; **PH** Gary Hensen.

CAST Jack Thompson, Carol Burns, Dennis Lill.

Reconstruction of Stanley Graham's killing spree in New Zealand in 1941.

Premiered in the UK. **CR** 'Very well received.' **MP** 'One hundred per cent.' **QI** Mark Shivas.

BRIMSTONE AND TREACLE

(Sherwood Productions and Namara Films)

EXP Naim Attallah; **P** Kenith Trodd; **D** Richard Loncraine; **SC** Dennis Potter; **PH** Peter Hannan.

CAST Sting, Joan Plowright, Denholm Elliott. Intelligent horror tale of demonic young man who enters the lives of a middle-aged couple and their spastic daughter.

Will be premiered in the UK. **QI** Kenith Trodd.



BRITANNIA HOSPITAL

(EMI and the National Film Finance Corporation)

P Clive Parsons, Davina Belling; **D** Lindsay Anderson; **SC** David Sherwin; **PH** Mike Fash.

CAST Leonard Rossiter, Graham Crowden, Joan Plowright, Jill Bennett, Malcolm McDowell.

Satire using a hospital as a metaphor for contemporary British society.

Premiered in the UK. **CR** 'Very bad in Britain and very good abroad.' **MP** 'Too early to tell.' **QI** Clive Parsons.

DARK CRYSTAL

(Henson Organisation for ITC)

EXP David Lazer; **P** Jim Henson, Gary Kurtz; **D** Jim Henson, Frank Oz; **SC** David Odell, Jim Henson; **PH** Oswald Morris.

CAST Jim Henson, Frank Oz, Kathy Mullen, Dave Goetz.

Fantasy epic dominated by special effects.

Not yet premiered in the US. **QI** Jim Henson, Frank Oz, Gary Kurtz.

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF HARRY

(Labrahurst for Channel 4)

P/D Chuck Despins; **SC** Howard Wakeling; **PH** Phil Meheux.

CAST Annette Crosbie, Cornelius Garrett.

Thriller mystery which raises historical as well as contemporary issues.

Will be premiered in the UK. **QI** Chuck Despins.

THE DRAUGHTSMAN'S CONTRACT

(BFI Production Board in association with Channel 4)

EXP Peter Sainsbury; **P** David Payne; **D/SC** Peter Greenaway; **PH** Curtis Clark.

CAST Anthony Higgins, Janet Suzman, Anne Louise Lambert, Hugh Fraser.

Bizarre tale of adultery, blackmail and murder in the 18th century: a draughtsman is contracted by a landowner's wife to provide drawings of the estate in return for sexual favours.

Premiered at the Edinburgh Festival. **QI** Peter Sainsbury.



ENIGMA

(An Archerwest-SFPC co-production in association with IFI and GFI and Perroquet Productions for Filmcrest International)

P Peter Shaw, Ben Arbeid (UK), André Pergament (France); **D** Jeannot Szwarc; **SC** John Briley; **PH** Jean-Louis Picavet.

CAST Martin Sheen, Brigitte Fossey, Sam Neill, Michel Lonsdale.

Spy thriller about Soviet defector.

Not yet known where it will premiere. **QI** Peter Shaw.

EVIL UNDER THE SUN

(Mersham Productions for EMI)

P John Brabourne, Richard Goodwin; **D** Guy Hamilton; **SC** Anthony Shaffer; based on the novel by Agatha Christie; **PH** Christopher Challis.

CAST Peter Ustinov, James Mason, Maggie Smith, Diana Rigg.

Exotic island hotel of possible murderers and victims for Agatha Christie's Poirot to detect.

Premiered in Australia (UK Royal Film Performance). **CR** 'As good as could be expected for the third of a series.' **MP** 'Seventy-five per cent.' **QI** Richard Goodwin (by phone).



FIVE DAYS ONE SUMMER

(originally MAIDEN, MAIDEN)

(Ladd Company)

EXP Peter Beale; **P/D** Fred Zinnemann; **SC** Michael Austin; **PH** Giuseppe Rotunno.

CAST Sean Connery, Betsy Brantley, Lambert Wilson, Anna Massey.

Romantic triangle in the Alps.

Not yet known where it will premiere. **QI** Peter Beale.

FOR YOUR EYES ONLY

(Eon Productions for United Artists)

EXP Michael Wilson; P Albert R. Broccoli; D John Glenn; SC Richard Maibaum; from an original idea by Richard Maibaum, Michael Wilson; PH Alan Hume.

CAST Roger Moore, Carole Bouquet, Topol, Lynne-Holly Johnson.

Stunt-filled adventure: James Bond up against his familiar enemy Blofeld.

Premiered in the US. CR 'Good.' MP 'Up to expectations.' Q1 Charles Juroe, Eon press officer (by phone).



FRIEND OR FOE

(Children's Film Foundation)

P Gordon L. T. Scott; D/SC John Krish; based on the novel by Michael Morpurgo; PH Ray Orton.

CAST John Bardon, Stacey Tendetter, Jennifer Piercey.

Wartime moral dilemma for two young evacuees after one is rescued by crashed German pilot.

Premiered in the UK. CR 'Very well received.' MP 'Has done very well and will soon be in profit.' Q1 S. Taylor, CFF secretary.

GANDHI

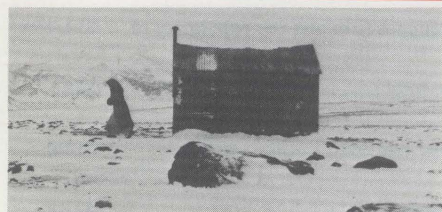
(Indo-British Films)

EXP Michael Stanley-Evans; P Richard Attenborough, Rani Dube; D Richard Attenborough; SC John Briley; PH Billy Williams.

CAST Ben Kingsley, Candice Bergen, Ian Charleson, Edward Fox.

The life of Gandhi.

Will be premiered in India, followed within 24 hours by London, and within 48 hours Washington and New York. Q1 Richard Attenborough (by phone).



GOLD

(BFI Production Board)

EXP Peter Sainsbury; P Nita Amy; D Sally Potter; SC Sally Potter, Lindsay Cooper, Rose English; PH Babette Mangolte.

CAST Julie Christie, Collette Laffont, Jacky Lansley.

A musical adventure around the theme of gold: an all-women production.

Will be premiered in the UK. Q1 Peter Sainsbury.

THE GREAT MUPPET CAPER

(ITC Films)

EXP Martin Starger; P David Lazer, Frank Oz; D Jim Henson; SC Tom Patchett, Jay Tarses, Jerry Juhl, Jack Rose; PH Oswald Morris.

CAST Frank Oz, Jim Henson, Dave Goelz.

Musical thriller romp with the anthropomorphic pig, frog, etc, from the TV series, plus human cameos.

Premiered in the US. CR 'Good.' MP 'It has not performed as well as was hoped, although it was the tenth highest grosser in America last summer.' Q1 Jim Henson, Frank Oz.

LADY CHATTERLEY'S LOVER

(London Cannon and Producteurs Associés)

EXP Menahem Golan, Yoram Globus; P Christopher Pearce, André Djaoui; D Just Jaeckin; SC Christopher Wicking, Just Jaeckin; based on the novel by D. H. Lawrence; PH Robert Fraisse.

CAST Sylvia Kristel, Nicholas Clay, Shane Briant.

The lady and the gamekeeper.

Premiered in France. CR 'Mildly successful; photography acclaimed; critics seemed surprised it wasn't exploitation.' MP 'Has recouped already.' Q1 Richard Shepherd, executive for Cannon Group (by phone).

PINK FLOYD: THE WALL

(Tin Blue)

EXP Steve O'Rourke; P Alan Marshall; D Alan Parker; SC Roger Waters; PH Peter Biziou.

CAST Bob Geldof, Kevin McKeon, David Bingham.

Study of pop star's retreat into madness, based on the Pink Floyd album, designs by Gerald Scarfe.

Premiered in the UK after the completion of this survey. Q1 Alan Marshall (by phone).



THE PIRATES OF PENZANCE

(Joseph Papp/Edward R. Pressman Productions)

EXP Edward R. Pressman; P Joseph Papp, Timothy Burrill; D/SC Wilford Leach; PH Douglas Slocumbe.

CAST Linda Ronstadt, Kevin Kline, Rex Smith, George Rose, Angela Lansbury.

Film of Joseph Papp's stage production of the Gilbert and Sullivan comic opera.

Will be premiered in the US, plus single satellite performance to be broadcast on Christmas Day. Q1 Timothy Burrill.

REMEMBRANCE

(Colin Gregg Film Productions for Channel 4)

P/D Colin Gregg; SC Hugh Stoddart; PH John Metcalfe.

CAST Ewan Stewart, David John, Gary Oldman.

The violence and pathos of a group of young sailors' last night on shore.

Premiered in the UK. CR 'Exceptionally good.' MP 'Too early to say.' Q1 Colin Gregg.



THE RETURN OF THE SOLDIER

(Skreba Films, Brent Walker and Golden Communications)

EXP Barry Cooper; P Simon Relph, Ann Skinner; D Alan Bridges; SC Hugh Whitmore; based on the novel by Rebecca West; PH Stephen Goldblatt.

CAST Julie Christie, Alan Bates, Glenda Jackson, Ann-Margret.

First World War tale of amnesia, class and conscience.

Will possibly premiere in Australia. Q1 Simon Relph (by phone).

THE SECRET POLICEMAN'S

OTHER BALL

(Amnesty International)

P Martin Lewis, Peter Walker; D Julian Temple; SC Marty Feldman, Michael Palin, Martin Lewis, cast; PH Oliver Stapleton.

CAST Rowan Atkinson, John Cleese, Billy Connolly, Pamela Stephenson, etc.

Roll-call of British comedians, musicians, etc, performing for an Amnesty Gala. Unlike its predecessors, this presentation of the stage show was made for the cinema.

Premiered in the UK. CR 'By and large very good, but suffered slightly from the wonderful reviews the last Amnesty concert received. In the US it has been amalgamated with *The Secret Policeman's Ball* and has had critical raves.' MP 'Up to expectations though slower than wished. Nevertheless is doing better business than the first film. Is a good stayer.' Q1 Martin Lewis (by phone).

TAKE IT OR LEAVE IT

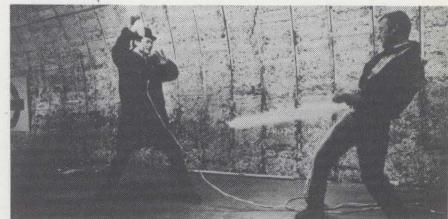
(Nutty-Stiff Productions)

P/D/SC David Robinson; PH Nic Knowland.

CAST Madness.

The story of the foundation of the North London band Madness.

Premiered in the UK. CR 'Good.' MP 'Not quite up to expectation. Madness, it was discovered, had a younger audience than was thought and a re-release is being negotiated aimed at this youth audience.' Q1 David Robinson.



AN UNSUITABLE JOB

FOR A WOMAN

(Boyd's Company)

EXP Don Boyd; P Michael Relph, Peter MacKay; D Christopher Petit; SC Christopher Petit, Brian Scobie, Elizabeth MacKay; based on the novel by P. D. James; PH Martin Schäfer.

CAST Pippa Guard, Billie Whitelaw, Paul Freeman.

Oblique treatment of English murder mystery.

Premiered in the UK. CR 'Very good by critics of fringe publications not so good by established critics.' MP 'Too early to say, although sale to Channel 4 will help towards recouping cost.' Q1 Michael Relph.

VICTOR/VICTORIA

(Blake Edwards Films for MGM)

P Tony Adams; D/SC Blake Edwards; PH Dick Bush.

CAST Julie Andrews, James Garner, Robert Preston.

Sexually ambiguous showbiz comedy set in the 30s.

Premiered in the US. CR 'Best critical reception Blake Edwards has ever received in the US and worst in the UK.' MP 'Very good. Its holding power has been excellent and has done solid business since it opened.' Q1 Tony Adams (by phone).

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

	Draft screen-play to start of pre-production	Start of pre-production to delivery of prints	Length of shooting	Aspects which helped attract finance	Total cost
AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON	6 years(1)	9 months	10 weeks	John Landis' success with <i>Kentucky Fried Movie</i> , <i>Animal House</i> and <i>The Blues Brothers</i>	\$5.8m
ANGEL	7 months	5 months	6 weeks	Script credibility; John Boorman as producer; right project at right time for Channel 4	490,000 punts (=£420,000)
THE APPOINTMENT	18 months	6 months	6 weeks	Research on multimedia market had revealed international commercial viability	£650,000
ASCENDANCY	2 years	15 months(2)	7 weeks	Very exciting treatment: considered important view of Ulster—different, sharp, undidactic	£250,000
BAD BLOOD	4 months	9 months	7 weeks	Quality of Andrew Brown as successful producer and his screenplay	£900,000
BRIMSTONE AND TREACLE	9 months	6 months	8 weeks	Quality of Dennis Potter's script and bankable quality of Sting	£900,000(3)
BRITANNIA HOSPITAL	9 months	11 months	12 weeks	Lindsay Anderson as director	£2.5m
DARK CRYSTAL	2 years	2 years	5 months	Excellent relationship with Lord Grade	\$25m
THE DISAPPEARANCE OF HARRY	2 years(4)	6 months	6 weeks	Quality of script	£400,000
THE DRAUGHTSMAN'S CONTRACT	7 months	1 year	8 weeks	Faith of BFI Production Board in Peter Greenaway; interest of subject	£300,000
ENIGMA	18 months	14 months	12 weeks	Quality of John Briley's screenplay	\$8m
EVIL UNDER THE SUN	4 years	13 months	11½ weeks	Third in a series of Agatha Christie successes	\$10m
FIVE DAYS ONE SUMMER (orig MAIDEN, MAIDEN)	1 year	18 months	18 weeks	Quality of screenplay and of director Fred Zinnemann	not revealed(6)
FOR YOUR EYES ONLY	9/10 months	9 months	21 weeks	One of a series of Bond films	\$28m
FRIEND OR FOE	1 year	8 months	10 weeks	Good book; right kind of story for direction in which CFF wished to move	£116,500
GANDHI	17 years	20 months	26 weeks	A relatively new company seeking a major production was attracted by a quality film(7)	\$20m
GOLD	15 months	15 months	9 weeks	BFI Production Board's traditional sympathy for feminist films; an all-women production	£180,000
THE GREAT MUPPET CAPER	9 months	8 months	5 months	Success of first Muppet film and the popularity of the Muppets	\$14/15m
LADY CHATTERLEY'S LOVER	3 months	18 months	11 weeks (budget 8)	Available classic; mild sex; popularity of Sylvia Kristel	\$3m
PINK FLOYD: THE WALL	3 years	1 year	12 weeks	Pink Floyd's music and Alan Parker's prestige	\$12m
THE PIRATES OF PENZANCE	4 months	1 year	81 days	Huge success of Joseph Papp's New York Shakespeare Festival production	\$11m
REMEMBRANCE	6 months(9)	7 months	5 weeks	Channel 4's commitment to contemporary drama; nothing bankable in commercial terms	£325,000
THE RETURN OF THE SOLDIER	26 months (10)	7 months	9 weeks	Prestige of stars and author Rebecca West; low budget	£1.75m
THE SECRET POLICEMAN'S OTHER BALL	3 weeks(12)	1 month	4 nights	Success of previous Amnesty film	£125,000
TAKE IT OR LEAVE IT	3 weeks	6 months	3 weeks	Popularity of the group Madness	£400,000
AN UNSUITABLE JOB FOR A WOMAN	1 year	6 months	7 weeks	Quality of basic story material(14)	£750,000
VICTOR/VICTORIA	not applicable	9 months	18 weeks	Subject matter; Blake Edwards' success with comedy; Julie Andrews	\$15m

(1) 'Generally thought too scary to be funny, or too funny to be scary.'

(2) 'Delays were caused by difficulties in location shooting.'

(3) 'Kenith Trodd and Dennis Potter deferred fees.'

(4) 'From first draft, two years; from third draft, as a TV film, 6/7 months.'

(5) 'Contracts are currently for TV only; new contracts will be negotiated if a theatrical release is possible.'

(6) 'Medium price budget taking *Variety* figures.'

(7) 'The final green light came when the Indian Government said that the Indian NFDC would underwrite the rupee requirement.'

(8) 'Major finance comes from non-industry money.'

Financed by	Origin of finance	If financed by distributor, which kind	UK tax advantage	Where filmed	British studio used	Percentage studio/location shooting	Primary world markets
Polygram/First National Bank of Chicago (London branch)	USA	—	YES	UK	Twickenham	65% L	theatrical
Irish Film Board/Channel 4	80% UK/ 20% Ireland	broadcast TV	not applicable	Ireland	—	100% L	TV/ theatrical
National Coal Board Pension Fund with guarantor	UK	—	YES	UK	Bray/ Pinewood	85% L	all markets
BFI/Channel 4	UK	broadcast TV	not applicable	UK	—	100% L	theatrical/ TV
Southern TV	UK	broadcast TV	not applicable	New Zealand	—	100% L	theatrical/ TV
Sherwood Productions/ Namara Films	50% USA/ 50% UK	—	not known	UK	Shepperton	75% S	theatrical
EMI/National Film Finance Corporation	UK	theatrical/ videogram	none	UK	Lee International	50% S	theatrical
ITC	UK	multimedia	investment tax credit	UK	EMI Elstree	95% S	theatrical
Channel 4	UK	broadcast TV	not applicable	UK	—	100% L	TV(5)
BFI/Channel 4	UK	broadcast TV	not applicable	UK	—	100% L	TV/limited theatrical
Goldcrest Films/SFPC	UK/ France	—	not yet	France	Pinewood (post-prod)	100% L	theatrical/ TV
EMI Films/Some additional sources	UK	theatrical	not known	UK/Spain	Lee International	60% S	theatrical
Ladd Company	USA/UK	theatrical	not applicable	Eng/Scot/ Switzerland	Shepperton/ Lee Internat	70% L	theatrical
United Artists	USA	theatrical	not revealed	Greece/ Italy	Pinewood	75% S	theatrical
Children's Film Foundation	UK	—	none	UK	—	100% L	theatrical/ TV later
60% Goldcrest/30% NFDC India/10% internat film investors	UK/ India	—	none(8)	India	Shepperton (6 days)	99% L	theatrical
BFI/Channel 4	UK	broadcast TV	not applicable	UK/ Iceland	—	100% L	theatrical/ TV
ITC	UK	multimedia	investment tax credit	UK/ USA (1 week)	EMI Elstree	70% S	presold all markets
Cannon Group	Europe via US sources	theatrical	YES	UK/ France	EMI Elstree	93% L	theatrical/ all markets
British banks	UK	—	not applicable	UK	Pinewood	60% L	all media
Universal	USA	theatrical	YES	UK	Shepperton	100% S	theatrical
Channel 4	UK	broadcast TV	not applicable	UK	—	100% L	TV/ theatrical
Barry Cooper Prods (£600,000); later Brent Walker	USA/UK	not applicable	YES(11)	UK	Samuelson (1 week)	90% L	theatrical
Amnesty International	UK	—	NO(13)	UK	—	100% L	theatrical/ TV
50% Stiff Records/50% Madness	UK	videogram	not applicable	UK	—	100% L	theatrical
Goldcrest Films/Boyd's Company/NFFC	UK	theatrical	YES(15)	UK	Bray	70% L	theatrical/ Channel 4
MGM	USA	theatrical	YES	UK	Pinewood	100% S	theatrical

(9) 'Five years from the original idea.'

(10) 'Eight or nine years since first discussions.'

(11) 'Not in the original financing, but Brent Walker will gain tax advantage through a leasing deal.'

(12) 'From concept to start of filming.'

(13) 'Principally because, in Britain, Amnesty International has been refused charitable status. Performers who give their talents free find it vexing that Amnesty gets taxed on its profits.'

(14) 'With regard to finance only, it was a disadvantage not having a more commercially viable director; it was a conventional seeming commercial story that attracted the financiers.'

(15) 'Not in the original financing. A subsequent leasing deal gave tax benefits to Goldcrest.'

quality (images like the banging curtain toggle in *Cream in My Coffee*, the long empty corridors in the train at night in *Caught on a Train* immediately come to mind). This is unlike verbal films such as *Kramer vs Kramer*, which Perry has described as 'television fare made to big screen technical standards.' Perry himself has now left the National Film Development Fund to produce *Another Time Another Place*, which is half financed by Channel 4, the manner in which the new channel is funding many films which will then be seen both in cinemas and on television.

Despite enjoying working in television because 'it is the area where you can take risks, no film company would have backed *The Naked Civil Servant*' (Gold), directors confess that they enjoy seeing their work on a bigger screen. Most of them—those who work in television; those who don't tend to illustrate their point—hate the snobbery that continues to divide television and film. But as Kenith Trodd, producer of the Dennis Potter films, points out, there is a 'different quality of the audience, a different level of attention.' A film surrounded by news, commercials and other programmes undergoes what Mamoun Hassan calls 'a constant erasure of experience.' There is also the problem of its quick death. 'The ephemerality of television exhibition is disheartening to the maker,' observed Isaacs. Or, as Trodd maintains more bluntly, they dislike 'the down the toilet use of television stuff.'

One major obstacle has been union agreements. 'Many people in the industry,' wrote Alan Sapper of the ACTT, 'believe that a film is a product equally suitable for television and the cinema. Others, who in my opinion have a more positive view, recognise that a cinema film is a totally different product when shown in a cinema than when it is cut to size for television showing.'

This does not allow for films which are made (on 35mm or Super 16mm) for the cinema and television. '*The Appointment* has been made for all media,' said Vickers. 'I make films,' said Chuck Despina, director of *The Disappearance of Harry*, 'it's not a question of where they are shown.' 'Take a really good film and you can enjoy it on either medium. Screens are channels, not themselves the message,' asserted Isaacs, who would like to see the demarcation of film and television 'eroded and abolished' but knows that changes in the unions will only come about 'with long and patient negotiation.'

Encouraging changes are being made. Colin Gregg cleared *Remembrance* with the ACTT and Equity for cinema and television and a special clause was put in the contract and agreed with Equity. His next project, Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, is even more unusual in its production arrangements. Union agree-

ments at the BBC do not allow films to be made for theatrical release, but with a special reverse co-production the BBC are putting in £400,000 and Gregg, who is raising the remainder, has theatrical rights for the film for the rest of the world. The 1982 productions for Channel 4 will continue this pattern. *Moonlighting*, the Jerzy Skolimowski film made in an extraordinarily short time this spring and which was acclaimed at Cannes, will certainly be released in cinemas although it was co-financed by Channel 4 and Michael White.

There will always be sceptics. 'I don't know if television will invest in theatrical production but I welcome the concept very much,' said Peter Beale; and one of several ignored recommendations of the Wilson Committee is that when television companies invest in film production the expense should be allowed against excess profit tax. Nevertheless, Isaacs promised, 'We will put back into the film industry in every way we can.'

A TERRIBLE WAY TO MAKE MOVIES

Channel 4 intends to make indigenous films. Isaacs: 'People need to see films that reflect their own experience and tell them about their own situation.' And together with the BFI and the NFFC, there is more opportunity to make low-budget indigenous films than for many years. 'If you are trying to make films that are credible and relate to their roots, it's important to keep budgets realistic,' said Clive Parsons. Outside the enthusiastic buzz of this low-budget boom, producers are less interested in films that relate and more concerned about attracting foreign capital. 'I don't think we need an indigenous British film industry, we make films whatever the subject may be,' said Timothy Burrill. 'What is vital is that the Chancellor grants the same tax advantages to film as to other capital investments.' Peter Shaw, producer of *Enigma*, agrees. 'The capital allowance is the most constructive thing the government has done in a long time; it would be tragic if it's taken away from the film business.'

Judging by the few films that succeeded in winning finance in 1981 ('And we're just the ones that got away—there were a dozen or so chasing finance at the same time that I was,' said Trodd, citing projects such as *Prick Up Your Ears*), it is getting even harder to finance big-budget British films. Trodd was 'as ever, turned down by all the usual British sources of finance.' *Brimstone and Treacle* was finally funded by an American company and Naim Attallah's *Namara* Films. 'The people who are capable of making films who have the expertise, enthusiasm and flair have to spend too

much time raising money,' Burrill said. 'Clive Parsons, David Puttnam and so on spend months moving around chasing finance. A huge amount of energy is being wasted by their having to go to financiers to raise the cash.'

The diminishing cinema audiences in Britain do not help the British producers, who need the American market to achieve any return. Here, they are increasingly met by the demand for a formula movie. 'It's like the marketing of a hit single,' said Martin Lewis, whose package of the two Amnesty shows is working its way into the US film charts, bringing needed cash back to Amnesty. 'There's a formula now for the cinema,' said Colin Gregg. 'If I'd followed that formula, *Remembrance* should have had two sex scenes and should have had its violence boosted at the end.' 'I deplore the system that says you have to do presales, that you have to have a bankable star,' agreed Timothy Burrill. 'It's a terrible way to make movies.' Setting up *Return of the Soldier* made Simon Relp equally pessimistic: 'It made me resolve at a level of cost that made me not dependent on the American market.'

Although this is a survey of Britain's worst year of film production, the prognosis none the less is encouraging. The lower end of the budget, boosted by Channel 4, is thriving and shows signs of finally wiping out the distinction between a film for television and one for cinema. It does not seem improbable to envisage a future where much of the financing for lower budget films comes from television and the films are then also shown on a thriving art house circuit.

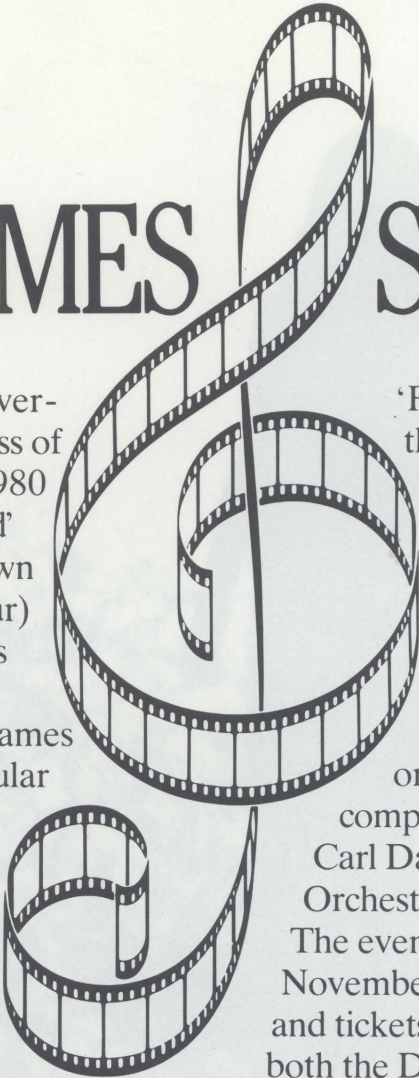
The main cinema chains will also change, and will probably make 'event' movies more of a pleasurable event to watch. Exhibitors are beginning to realise that if they continue to charge high prices and compete with home video they must offer the public some return in comfort and facilities. Home video will naturally continue to develop. Even the Children's Film Foundation is currently arranging television and video sales of its work to enable it to survive (wasn't one of the aims of the Foundation to persuade children away from television and into cinemas?). Almost all the other films in the survey have high hopes of sales to home video. No major film being made can ignore the video market, but conversely video companies will almost certainly begin to invest in film production.

For those seeking finance for British films the situation is not as arid as it was even a year ago. Production companies such as Boyd's Company and Handmade are highly active, and the success of *Gandhi*—if it is successful—may help to break the dam of British financial indifference. Last year was a dry year for British films but 1982 already promises new springs of hope.

(I am indebted to Simon Perry for help in preparing this survey.)

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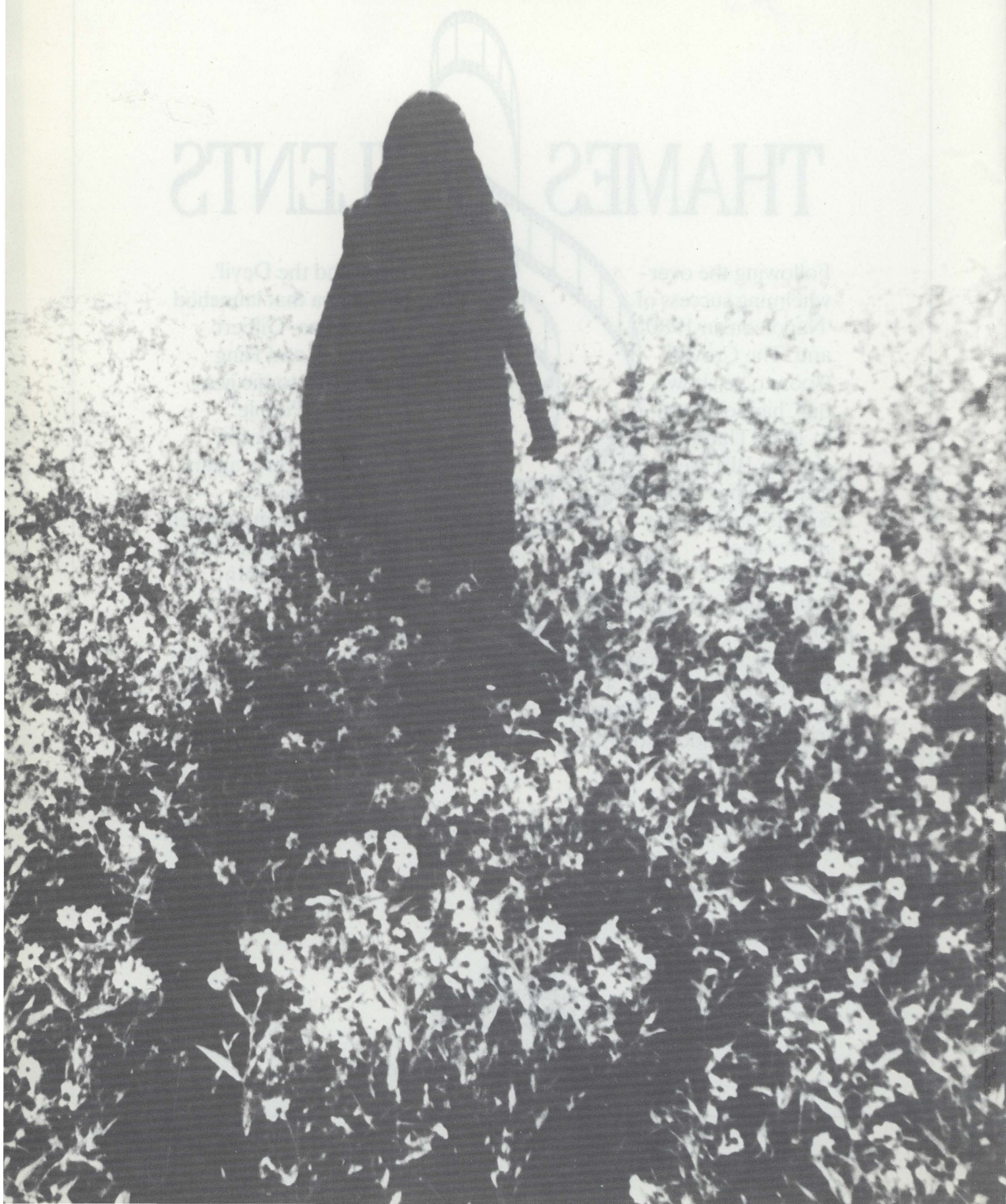
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UNDER WE



STERN EYES

Satyajit Ray

Do Western audiences fully understand Eastern films? In the year of the Festival of India, it seemed particularly appropriate to ask India's greatest film-maker to define his relationship with the West.

When I was halfway through the shooting of *Pather Panchali*, Monroe Wheeler of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, came to Calcutta to collect material for an exhibition of Indian art. Our shooting was held up for lack of funds—not for the first time—and I was back at my advertising job. I had an arrangement with my firm whereby I could take time off for shooting when we had money, and be back at my desk when the money ran out. Wheeler came to our office. He had heard I was at work on a film, and asked to see stills. I showed him a dozen or so. 'Do you think you could let us have this film for our exhibition?' he asked. 'That's a year from now.'

I could hardly believe my ears. The one thing that had kept me from throwing up my hands and calling off the whole project in spite of repeated and massive setbacks was the hope that my film would one day reach a western audience. Now it seemed I was going to gain my objective far sooner than I had any right to expect. But why was it so important to reach a western audience? Simply because, given the higher standard of films in the west (one didn't know the Japanese cinema yet), one expected a higher level of appreciation to go with it. All the world knew that India turned out a vast number of films with a lot of singing and dancing in them. The fact that fat books of film history gave only half a page to this champion consumer of celluloid was not surprising, since few Indian films ever reached the west where such books were written.

About ten per cent of India's output came from Bengal, where I worked. Bengal had a small market and a large pride in its literary tradition. It didn't make

song-and-dance movies; it made tame, torpid versions of popular Bengali novels for an audience whom years of cinematic spoon-feeding had reduced to a state of unredeemable vacuity. The urban intelligentsia had access to foreign films, mostly American, and therefore could claim to be more perceptive. But they were too small in number for the serious film-maker to bank on. As for critics, what passed for film criticism in India usually consisted of a tortuous recounting of a film's plot, followed by a random dispersal of praise or blame on the people concerned in its making. Neither the film-makers nor the public took much heed of it.

What was also regrettable was the insidious notion, probably concocted by the same critics, that cinema being a product of the technological west, our own efforts should not be judged in too harsh a light. After all, ran the argument, the west had all the money and all the resources; we didn't.

The fact is, film-makers the world over used the same tools, the same technology. The rules of the cottage industry simply didn't apply. One could spin yarn at home by turning a wheel, but to spin the simplest yarn on celluloid the wheels of a large-scale, fully fledged industry had to turn. We didn't lack resources. We had tools and actors and craftsmen aplenty. We had, yes, a literary tradition. So we had stories, and we had themes to turn into stories. What we lacked were the faculties of mind to make the best use of what we had.

This is what had to be proved. It was high time the Indian cinema came of age, and high time it came out of its self-imposed seclusion to be measured by the standards of the west.

Six months after Monroe Wheeler's visit came John Huston. Huston was in India to look into the possibilities of filming *The Man Who Would Be King*. Wheeler, whom he knew well, had asked him to enquire on the state of my film and, if possible, to take a look at some of the footage. Doubtless he was anxious to know from an expert if his hunch had paid off.

I showed Huston ten minutes of silent rough cut, choosing the passage where Apu and Durga have their first sight of the train. 'A fine, sincere piece of film-making,' was Huston's comment. But he warned me against showing long stretches of aimless wandering, which is what the two children do before they happen upon the train. 'The audience gets restive,' he added. 'They don't like to be kept waiting too long before something happens.' But he gave a good report to Wheeler.

The effort to catch the Museum's deadline took on epic proportions, and my editor and I were done up to a frazzle by the end. But we made it, just. The Museum had rightly announced the screening as the world premiere of the film. There was to be a hand-picked audience including, I was told, the Gish sisters. The print had no subtitles, and I had no opportunity to take a look at it before sending it.

I believed I had made a good film, but while I waited for word from the Museum, doubts began to creep into my mind. Why should a western audience care for a downbeat tale of poverty in a remote Indian village? In the total absence of familiarity—with the people, the place, the problems, the language—how could the audience be involved? And without involvement, how could the film

work? Has any Indian film ever worked with a western audience—especially one that eschewed all the trappings of the exotic? No tigers, no maharajahs, no fakirs, no snake charmers, no nautch girls...

The more I pondered, the more I realised how hopeless it was. There was nothing to suggest that, outside the field of specialisation, the west took the slightest interest in India. The Taj Mahal drew the tourists, of course, as did the burning dead on the ghats at Benares. But there it ended. A vast sub-continent with one of the oldest and richest traditions of art, music and literature, existed only to be ignored.

That this apathy should apply as much to Britain, which once ruled India, as to any other western country is astonishing, but true. The fact is, the Colonised have, willy-nilly, developed considerable interest in the Colonisers, never the other way round. There are exceptions to this, of course. Both in the days of the East India Company and during the Raj, travellers, civil servants, soldiers, missionaries and others had recorded their impressions of India. Some of these memoirs reveal a genuine insight into the country and its people. Travelling in slow stages by boat, buggy and palanquin brought these sojourners into close touch with life in the countryside, until the railways brought in speed and privacy. Such accounts, both in words and pictures, were often a reflection of personal enthusiasm combined with pride in the Empire. To what extent such enthusiasm infected the dwellers in the Island, and how much of the information provided by the memoirs seeped into their consciousness, is debatable. At any rate, barring students of Indian social history, who reads such memoirs now? How many know the paintings and aquatints of Zoffany, Doyly, Hodges, the Daniell brothers?

Schoolboys in Britain must have read of the derring-do that helped to consolidate the Empire. Names and events to inspire a surge of patriotic feeling: Clive and Hastings; Scinde and Seringapatam; Lawrence, Napier and Campbell; the Afghan campaigns; the Sepoy uprising, with the dreaded Nana Sahib as a thorn in the flesh of the Raj. But history ceased to enthrall as, closer to our times, the blood and thunder gave way to prosaic parleys, and the irksome Struggle for Independence grew and spread and took the wind out of the Raj's sails.

Against the British schoolboy's knowledge of Indian history, however fragmentary and biased, must be placed such grotesque stereotypes as Hurree Jamset Ram Singh of the fourth form at Greyfriars. Here, in the pages of the weekly that was once every British schoolboy's gospel, is H.J.R.S. ('Inky') holding forth: 'The rowfulness is not the proper caper, my esteemed Bob... Let dogs delight in the barkfulness and bitefulness, but the soft answer is the cracked pitcher that goes longest to a bird in the bush, as the English proverb remarks.'

Late Victorian and Edwardian novelists sometimes used the more exotic and

sinister aspects of India in what were basically stories of mystery and adventure. The most famous example is of course *The Moonstone*. Indeed, the jewel in the forehead of the many-armed Hindu idol had a remarkably long and sturdy existence. It kept cropping up in tales of adventure till well into the Georgian era. Both Conan Doyle and Jules Verne turned more than once to India for inspiration. It was an Andamanese poison-dart that killed Bartholomew Sholto in *The Sign of Four*, and Captain Nemo turned out to be an ex-maharajah whose kingdom had been usurped by the British. These stories and others in the same genre, read far more avidly than the factual accounts, shed no more light on India than Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

There might have been some hope had a large body of Indian literature been available to the west in translation. It has never been so. Tagore had a brief vogue in the west early in this century, the brevity being a direct consequence of the inadequacy of the translations. The handful of Indian writers who write in English and are read and admired in the west, such as R. K. Narayan, do illuminate certain aspects of India, but not enough to dispel the widespread ignorance. How else to explain a major writer like Paul Scott getting so many of his Indian names wrong? Mr Subhas Chand Gupta Sen, the North Indian, in *The Jewel in the Crown*, is about as convincing as Mr Gottfried Donald Mac, the Frenchman; and Darwaza Singh in the same novel would translate perfectly as Mr Front Door Smith. What is distressing is the way such gaffes are flung in the face of the reader, as if getting the facts right about India is of the least concern to a western writer. The one writer who gets his Indian details consistently right is H. R. F. Keating, in his Inspector Ghote novels. But who expects profound insights into a country and its people from detective stories, good as they may be?

Certainly the most sensitive novel about India by an Englishman is *A Passage to India*. But even Forster had no access to large areas of the Indian mind. There is a scene in the tennis club between two Englishwomen, Mrs Moore and Miss Quested, and a Bengali couple, the Bhattacharjis. Recently arrived and anxious to 'know' India, Mrs Moore suggests that they call on the Bengalis some day. The latter readily agree and promise to send their carriage to pick them up 'on Thursday morning'. Thursday comes but the carriage never arrives. The English ladies conclude that they must have made some stupid blunder and caused offence.

The incident has the kind of plausibility that suggests Forster himself may have had the same experience and felt just as nonplussed as Mrs Moore and Miss Quested. And yet for an Indian there is no mystery here. It is a typical Anglo-Indian situation which turns on the problem of language. The conversation between the three ladies suggests that Mrs Bhattacharji's command of English is at best rudimentary. If the

English ladies did call, she, as the hostess, would have to contribute in a large measure to the conversation. The prospect being too unnerving, the Bhattacharjis never meant to send the carriage in the first place. And yet they said they would because not to have done so would have called for excuses and more groping for words. The choice here was between seeming discourteous and seeming stupid. An easy choice for an Indian in British India, since the first was more likely to put an end to such embarrassments as far as these two memsahibs were concerned.

Kipling, writing about Indians, often gets closer to the truth than any western writers before or since. *The Miracle of Purun Bhagat* could well be the work of a particularly gifted Indian writer, and Hurree Chunder Mookerjee is the nearest the west has come to portraying a Bengali in fiction whose Babuisms ring true. The beautiful Mowgli stories have served as typical Indian fables in the absence of genuine fables and folk tales which, though translated, never took roots in the west as did, say, Ali Baba, Sinbad and Aladdin.

And yet Kipling's stories could hardly be expected to unravel all the mysteries. India is too vast, too complex, too multi-layered for one writer, or half-a-dozen or a dozen writers to cope with. The Indian's knowledge of the English is based not on a handful of books, but a whole spectrum ranging from comics and penny dreadfuls to Shakespeare and the classics. The study of English had been imposed from the top as an imperialist policy. While serving functional and academic ends, it grew in many cases to a pursuit for its own sake. More often than not this pursuit took place without any actual contact with the British, who were not only unapproachable, but virtually invisible to the average Indian. The closest that he got to an Englishman was the Tommy on his charger swinging his baton over a cowering Indian football crowd. But the important thing is that the fact of Imperialism with all its implications never got in the way of this study of English that opened the door to an alien culture.

Learning about Britain from books had its hazards, though. I read Wodehouse as a schoolboy and came to believe that most homes in England employed butlers, while the Sherlock Holmes stories conjured up a London perpetually shrouded in impenetrable fog. (In my thirty odd visits to that city I have not once encountered the London fog.) It took many years and much reading for the jigsaw pieces to begin to fit and a picture to emerge that came close to the reality.

There was no way the English could get so close to India. Not even in India. There was some intercourse between the rulers and the ruled in the early days of the Company when the English smoked hookahs, gave nautch parties and spoke Indian languages. The British civilian then had to learn an Indian language before he stepped on the soil of India. All this changed slowly through the 19th



British India: Richard Attenborough (General Outram) in 'The Chess Players'.

century till the trouble over the Sepoys drove a wedge between the two communities and put an end to all socialising. 'Knowing' India was henceforth confined to well-meaning visitors like Mrs Moore and Miss Quested. Till Independence caused an exodus, the British simply lived here, having fashioned a world where they could pursue their native habits. A home from home. Away from their Island, but insular still.

If such were the Britons in India, what hope that those back home would be otherwise? Or the rest of the western world, free from proximity to this alien culture, free from any compulsion to come to grips with it? The upshot was that, the effort of memoirists, Indologists and historians notwithstanding, India remained a nebulous entity to the west; a vast amorphism that refused to take on a semblance of the familiar.

The few films about India from the west only helped to strengthen this feeling. The emphasis was on the westerners; the few Indians merely flitted about, lent colour, and conformed to stereotypes. Ramon Novarro's *Son of India*, a Hindu

Brahmin sporting a Sikh turban and bearing the Muslim name of Karim, may be a spectre from the dim past, but what about the suave Brahmin Mr Bannerji in *The Rains Came*, getting down on his knees and intoning gibberish with folded palms to appease the Rain God? The Peter Sellers brand of Indian, though played with subtle relish, is really an extension of Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh, good for a laugh and not much else. And once again, as in the novels, the ignorance is brazenly flaunted. For a land where cows are holy and God is a phallus, anything will pass for the truth. . .

The sights and sounds and moods of India, or rather, the Bengal riverside, were caught beautifully by Renoir in *The River*. But this too was primarily a story of Britons in India. The presence of a GI would date the story around the mid-40s, a period of considerable political unrest. But Renoir's placid, poetic approach, and the script by Rumer Godden and Renoir, bar the intrusion of such elements. As a result an air of fairytale unreality pervades the whole film, and robs it of value as a social document.

My apprehensions about *Pather Panchali* were proved wrong. Although the first cable from Monroe Wheeler saying 'a triumph of sensitive photography' only confirmed my doubts, a letter—not from Wheeler—which soon followed assured me at length that the film had gone down well at the Museum.

In September 1958, I was in the lobby of the Fifth Avenue Playhouse in New York where *Pather Panchali* had its US premiere. I watched the audience surge out of the theatre bleary-eyed and visibly shaken. An hour or so later, in the small hours, came the morning edition of the *New York Times*. It carried Bosley Crowther's review of my film. Crowther was the doyen of New York critics, with power to make or mar a film's prospects as a saleable commodity. Crowther was unmoved by *Pather Panchali*. In fact, he said the film was so amateurish that 'it would barely pass for a rough cut in Hollywood.' Later, he had second thoughts as letters poured in to say how wrong he was. The film ran for eight months.

And yet I know Crowther was not wholly wrong. Judged on the level of craftsmanship, there was much that was wrong with my film. It couldn't be otherwise. We shot it in sequence, learning as we went along. The early part clearly shows we were groping with the medium. Shots are held for too long, cuts come at wrong points, the pace falters, the camera is not always placed in the right position. The second half is much more assured and—this is what was probably behind the film's wide success—works well on an emotional level, even with a western audience.

How does this success square with the fact that the western audience, barring a few stray exceptions, knew nothing about India, and probably cared even less? What is the first thing a western viewer tries to perceive in a film? For that matter, what does anyone try first to perceive in any film? The story, of course. Everyone everywhere understands a story. It is a trait common to all cultures—from the Eskimo to the Hottentot. What in its bare bones is the story of *Pather Panchali*? A poor family fights a losing battle against adversity, leaves hearth and home to set off towards an uncertain future. A simple, universal situation holding in its implication of conflict the promise of a screenplay.

The novel *Pather Panchali* was a sprawling saga whose leisurely, episodic unfolding perfectly caught the rhythm and pace of life in a Bengal village. In this it had wholly departed from the terseness of the earliest 19th century Bengali novels which were inspired by European models. In adapting it, I tried to combine the relaxed quality of the original with a tightness called for by the exigencies of the conventional feature film. Incidents had to be discarded and shuffled around, characters dropped (the original had over three hundred, the film thirty), and the story made to progress along a curve that rose and fell in a succession of contrasted episodes.



Contrast was important in the absence of a tight dramatic structure. Also, to give the film the semblance of a story, I introduced the element of causality. In the novel, the two deaths—old Auntie's and Durga's—are shown as unrelated by causal links to anything that precedes them. In the film, Auntie's death can be seen as a consequence of her sister-in-law's cruelty, while Durga dies from pneumonia caused by her ecstatic surrender to the monsoon shower. And so on. The outline that emerged was simple enough as a story to be comprehensible at all levels.

Next was the stage of fleshing out. The familiar lineaments were now given an overlay of details—of speech, behaviour, habits, customs, rituals—which placed the story in a specific time and place within a specific culture. This was further strengthened by shooting on actual locations and using an unadorned style of photography.

Since with all its details the film had a simple structure, a western viewer could keep his bearings by holding on to the basic story and relationships, while a host of new information, new impressions played upon his consciousness, dislodging or reinforcing preconceived notions, arousing by turns his interest and apathy, surprise, conviction and disbelief. What will Auntie do with that dried-up coconut leaf she's just dragged in? What is Durga doing squatting on the ground before a sapling, reciting what sounds like doggerel? What does that four-armed idol with an elephant's head stand for? A brass band playing 'Tipperary' at a village wedding in Bengal? How droll! ... If in this welter of impressions his empathy is aroused, the film will work for him, certainly as a story he believes in, and also, if he is able to respond to those qualities which make a film a film, as a work of art.

Of course, there are obvious risks in exposing an audience to a wholly alien culture. There was an American lady, for instance, who was so upset by the spectacle of Indians eating with their fingers that she had to leave the theatre as soon as the second dinner episode commenced. But such squeamishness is not common. If details confuse, or offend, or go over the head, there is always the human element to fall back upon.

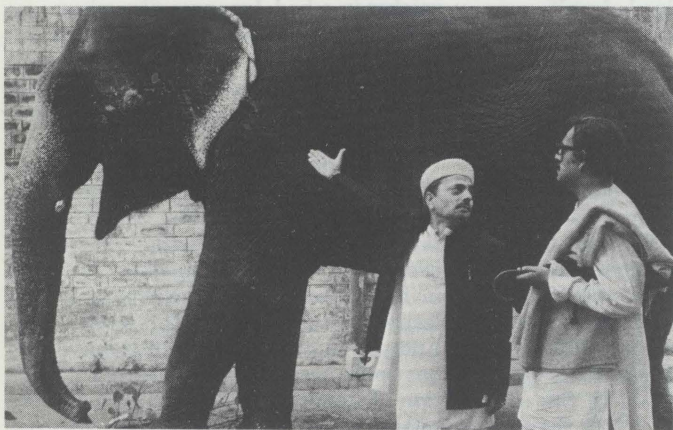
In *The World of Apu*, Apu attends the wedding of a friend's sister. The bridegroom (this is an arranged marriage) arrives and is found to be touched in the head. With the bride's mother refusing to give away her daughter, the marriage seems on the verge of being abandoned. If it doesn't take place at the appointed hour, the bride would be cursed and made unmarriageable for life. The crisis is averted at the last moment by Apu offering to step in as the groom. A western viewer ignorant of orthodox Hindu customs must find the episode highly bizarre. But since Apu himself finds it so, and since his action is prompted by compassion, the viewer accepts it on moral grounds, though given no opportunity to weigh the pros and cons of a seemingly irrational practice.

Faced with a film from an alien culture, swamped by details which evoke no responses in him, a viewer will often find that the only aspect which offers a common ground is the moral one. Broad concepts of good and evil, right and wrong, do not vary much from culture to culture. Human behaviour also falls within patterns which are largely familiar and predictable. Abnormal situations may affect such behaviour as, say, in Hitler's Germany; but as long as a film makes the context clear, a viewer is unlikely to lose his bearings. This can happen only when the development of the story itself turns on social and

historical factors of which the viewer has no knowledge.

The western critic who hopes to do full justice to *Devi* (*The Goddess*) must be prepared to do a great deal of homework before he confronts the film. He must read up on the cult of the Mother Goddess; on the 19th century renaissance in Bengal and how it affected the values of orthodox Hindu society; on the position of the Hindu bride in an upper-class family, and on the relationship between father and son in the same family. All the turns and twists of the plot grow out of one or more of these factors. The western critic who hasn't done his homework will pin his faith on the rational son to save him from the swirls and eddies of an alien value system; but even here the son's ultimate helplessness will convince him only if he is aware of the stranglehold of Hindu orthodoxy in 19th century Bengal. *Devi* was widely condemned in India as an attack on Hindu religion when what it really attacked was fanaticism. This is one instance out of many of the obstacles faced by the serious filmmaker in India.

In a film like *Charulata*, which has a 19th century liberal upper-class background, the relationship between the characters, the web of conflicting emotions, the development of the plot and its denouement, all fall into a pattern familiar to the western viewer. The setting is a western-style mansion, the decor is Victorian, the dialogue strewn with references to western literature and politics. But beneath this veneer of familiarity the film is chock-a-block with details to which he has no access. Snatches of song, literary allusions, domestic details, an entire scene where Charu and her beloved Amal talk in alliterations (thereby setting a hopeless task for the subtitle)—all give the film a density missed by the western viewer in his



Far left: Ray directing the 'Postmaster' story in 'Teen Kanya' (1961). Left page: 'The World of Apu', the wedding; the English-speaking Indians of 'Kanchenjunga'. This page: Victorian decor in 'Charulata'; 'The Middleman'. Below: 'The Chess Players' (1977), Ray with Sanjeev Kumar.



preoccupation with plot, character, the moral and philosophical aspects of the story, and the apparent meaning of images.

To give an example. Early on in the film, *Charulata* is shown picking out a volume from a bookshelf. As she walks away idly turning its pages, she is heard to sing softly. Only a Bengali will know that she has turned the name of the author—the most popular Bengali novelist of the period—into a musical motif. Later, her brother-in-law Amal makes a dramatic entrance during a storm reciting a well-known line from the same author. There is no way that subtitles can convey this fact of affinity between the two characters so crucial to what happens later. *Charulata* has been much admired in the west; so have many of my other films. But this admiration has been based on aspects to which response has been possible; the other aspects being left out of the reckoning.

Even those films of mine which have been admired have often been described by western critics as being slow. Indeed, they often *are* slow, and there are several reasons for this. My first two films, *Pather Panchali* and *Aparajito*, had to be slow because of their subject matter. I knew I was taking a risk. What I didn't know was how difficult it is to sustain a slow pace without seeming ponderous and boring. Provided the subject is interesting, a film can hold an audience in spite of slowness by means of (a) an extreme precision of cutting which ensures that shots are not held even for a split second beyond their expressive limits, and (b) an expressive soundtrack that helps to mitigate the slowness. A scene with its soundtrack turned off seems slower than it actually is because it withholds information, and is therefore less meaningful. Both *Pather Panchali*

and *Aparajito* were rushed in the editing stage because of deadlines, and both had inadequate soundtracks. Faltering pace and long stretches of virtual silence affected the latter film more seriously because it was more episodic and less rich in human material than the first.

As for my other films, most of them are primarily about human relationships. To make characters credible and their interplay interesting needs footage. A fast pace would subvert all attempts at psychological probing. But some of the slowness may result from the fact that when a word, a gesture, an allusion or an image carries a special meaning, and is not understood as doing so, it may seem like a redundancy. A series of such apparent redundancies may well add up to a feeling of slowness—of time being wasted on inessentials.

To a western viewer, my films dealing with life in the city today are less likely to seem slow not only because urban life itself is faster, but also because the viewer feels far less trammelled by cultural differences. Not only the physical aspects—lifestyle, dress, architecture, surroundings—but the subjects themselves must seem nearer home. Joblessness, corruption, the rat race, problems of the working woman—these are global themes. Young men and women facing these problems in Calcutta behave in much the same way as their counterparts in any big city in the west.

Even the speech of the educated Bengali is often peppered with English words and phrases. Western critics often seem bothered by this, perhaps seeing in it an unfortunate legacy of Imperialism. This being largely true is itself a justification for their use in films. But often these phrases convey feelings and nuances for which Bengali has no equivalents, just as English has no precise equivalents for *blasé* and *passé*. Sometimes, as in

Kanchenjunga, a film may actually be making a point about the degrees of westernisation undergone by a given set of characters. This would come out in the frequency with which English occurs in their speech. One who desists from its use would suggest a different background and upbringing from one who doesn't.

The use of 'sorry' and 'thank you', for which few Indian languages have words, must surely have started as an aping of English manners. It has now become a habit with westernised Indians. Those who do not use them use the old substitute of gestures: a smile and a nod to acknowledge a favour; a pained, apologetic look and a click of the tongue where hurt has been caused—both coming more from the heart than their somewhat mechanical English equivalents.

'Classical' and 'humanist' are epithets often used by western critics to describe my films. They are generally used as compliments, and occasionally, one suspects, as euphemisms for old-fashioned, a further insinuation being that my films are not innovative.

If classical implies an orderly unfolding of events with a beginning, a middle and an end—in *that order*; a firm rein applied to emotion; and an avoidance of disorientation for its own sake, then I will be only too happy with the label. Apart from the fact that such traits are a reflection of my temperament, they are also necessary to my need for communication. All my films are made with my own Bengali audience in view. As long as it takes a minimum of three years for any film I make to reach the west (it took 24 years for *The Music Room* to reach Paris), the Bengali audience will remain my first audience. This audience has grown more perceptive over the years. As a result, I have managed to do without the three main ingredients of popular

Bengali cinema: songs, melodrama and wordiness. Bengalis, who love the theatre more than they love films, love words for their own sake. But there is a large audience now who will not only listen, but use their eyes and their minds as well. This is the audience that makes a serious film a viable proposition, provided it tells a story which has the power to hold. A director who discards the popular elements and stops telling a story in comprehensible terms digs his own grave.

But I do not think that the story *per se* is old-fashioned. A plot which is seen to be a plot, a contrivance, is old-fashioned; but if it seems to grow out of the characters, and if it acquires a fullness through details that place it firmly in time and in a milieu, and on top of that give it a texture that is seen as a uniquely cinematic quality, then it is no longer old-fashioned, nor even aptly described as classical. What is important surely is the sensibility that marks the progression from A to Z, and the sensibility and moral attitude that inform the exploration of human motives, human behaviour—in short, humanism.

I should be happier with the description 'timeless'. Bach is timeless. So is Masaccio. So is Buster Keaton. So are Indian and Egyptian sculpture, the murals of Ajanta, Chinese painting, Japanese woodcuts, Etruscan vases, Benin bronzes, the horse of Lascaux and the bison of Altamira...

Of course it would be an anachronism today for a composer to write music like Bach or Mozart; but for all film-makers to use the idiom of Jean-Luc Godard or Jean-Marie Straub in a do-or-die bid to be contemporary would drive them all out of jobs and empty all cinemas. As long as films call for big budgets and the resources of a large industry, as long as film-makers feel responsible to the individual or the corporation that provides them with the means to be creative, the need to reach a large audience will be there.

As for innovation, all artists owe a debt to innovators and profit by such innovation. Godard gave me the courage to dispense largely with fades and dissolves, Truffaut to use the freeze. But all innovation is not external. There is a subtle, almost imperceptible kind of innovation that can be felt in the very texture and sinews of a film. A film that doesn't wear its innovations on its sleeve. A film like *La Règle du Jeu*. Humanist? Classical? Avant-Garde? Contemporary? I defy anyone to give it a label. This is the kind of innovation that appeals to me.

Although I have acknowledged my debt to western classical music, it is difficult to pinpoint where such debt is to be felt in my films. Cinema has an obvious affinity with music in that both exist as fixed patterns in time. But film is concerned with subject matter, while music, at least in its instrumental form, is not. When I talk of Mozart as an influence, I am thinking more of his operas and his miraculous ability to have groups of characters maintain their individuality through elaborate ensem-

bles. Leporello's stuttering fright, the Don's bravado in the face of doom and the Commendatore's relentless intoning of his challenge in the Statue Scene in *Don Giovanni* is but one example out of many. I am greatly fascinated by the possibility of such ensembles in films. The memory game in *Days and Nights in the Forest* attempts this. Here the game itself is the ground bass over which the six characters play out their individual roles in word, look, and gesture.

There is another such scene in *Charulata* involving four 'voices'. Amal's unexpected duplicity has stung Charu to the quick, and she runs through a whole gamut of feelings—shock, disbelief, smouldering anger, heart-wrenching agony—assuming with supreme effort a normal façade when her unsuspecting husband butts in, spouting politics, while a self-centred Amal, flushed by his first literary success, rubs salt in Charu's wound by his unfeeling ebullience—the entire goings-on observed with pensive detachment by Manda, Charu's earthy, uncomplicated sister-in-law. This is the scene where the note of tragedy is struck for the first time, and it is this note which, like a pedal-point, holds the scene together.

I am fully aware now, thanks to my western critics, of the western traits in my films. They have so often been brought to my notice that I can actually name them: irony, understatement, humour, open endings, the use of leit-motifs, a fluid camera and so on. These elements are never used consciously. It is not as if I find myself saying: Ah, now for a bit of British understatement. They are used intuitively to best serve the needs of the subject matter in hand. I only try to tell a story in the best possible way, balancing the needs of art with the need to reach an audience. By no means a unique preoccupation for a film-maker, but perhaps involving more risks than usual in the context of India. The western elements often perturb the Indian viewer in the same way as the indigenous elements perturb the western viewer. *Kanchenjunga* turned out to be so western in feeling that it put off most Indian viewers. *Days and Nights in the Forest* provoked comments like: What does the film say? Where is the message? Why isn't the director more articulate? Actually the film says a lot, but not always in words, certainly not in those of rhetoric. But who bothers to read between the lines of a film?

What is attempted in these films and in most other films of mine is, of course, a synthesis. But it can be seen as such only by someone who has his feet in both cultures. Someone who will bring to bear on the films involvement and detachment in equal measure. Someone who will see both the wood and the trees.

That Indian films can set up a cultural barrier for Indians is a fact brought home only recently. A resurgence in Indian cinema has thrown up young and promising film-makers in regions new to film production. Faced with films from the

provinces of Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra and Tamilnad, a Bengali finds himself in a position not so different from a western viewer confronted with the same films. Underlying the broad cultural pattern that is India, a thousand disparities in behaviour, habits, rituals, dress, topography, language and so on make these films less immediately accessible to a Bengali than an average film from Europe or America. Even the sound of an unfamiliar language can be disconcerting. The Japanese grunt can still provoke a snicker in a bad Japanese film where one is not obliged to be on one's best behaviour as in a film, say, by Ozu. I don't envy the western critics who are suddenly faced with this bewildering array of sub-cultural variations.

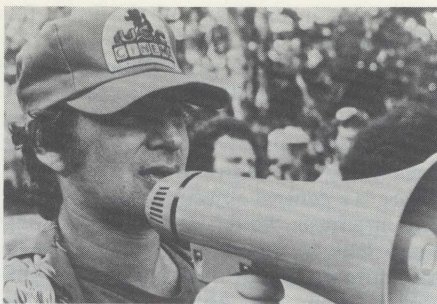
No wonder it has led to some serious aberrations of judgment. The chorus of praise showered on the South-Indian mythological film *Seetha Kalyanam* (*Seetha's Wedding*) launched it on an invitation tour of the international film festival circuit where it won more praise. And yet, in fifty years of filmgoing I have not come across a more flagrant exhibition of unmitigated kitsch. As a cultural hybrid which takes an episode from one of the two great Hindu epics, swamps the interiors with Persian carpets, Mughal chandeliers and comic-strip wall paintings; floods the soundtrack with what is claimed to be classical Carnatic music, but turns out mostly to be high-decibel film songs à la Bombay; punctuates the story with camera tricks that were already clichés in the early days of the talkies; and wraps the whole thing up in the colours of a chocolate box, *Seetha Kalyanam* is a concoction par excellence. One could see it as being mildly enjoyable as camp, though that is not how the critics saw it. They took it seriously.

This indicates a collapse of sensibility which would send them all back to square A as expositors of Indian cinema to the west but for the fact that one knows too well the traps a film in an unfamiliar genre from an unfamiliar culture can set for a critic. Once, sitting on the jury in Moscow, I found a Soviet colleague, a distinguished film-maker, driven to paroxysms of laughter by a particularly mirthless comedy from the west. I asked him later what he found so funny. He was apologetic. 'You see,' he explained, 'we see so few comedies here that we really don't know what is funny and what is not.'

I suppose for a critic such frank admission of bafflement would be possible only at the expense of his claim to be one step ahead of the audience and the film-makers at all times. Such single-mindedness must take its toll, and one commiserates with him. But one also feels grateful to the critics for all that they have done to promote the cause of new Indian cinema in the west. It is more important for the west now to see our films than to understand them. In any case, true understanding will take time. Slighted for so long, India will not yield up her secrets to the west so easily, for cows are still holy here, and God is still a phallus. ■

The case history of Steven Spielberg is a strange one. It is as though the rapid success, extraordinary grasp of public taste and almost complete production control of this director still in his early 30s have all proved too rich a cocktail for many British and European critics. His virtual refusal to give interviews over the past three years may also have prompted a certain irritation. But nothing fully explains the quietly swelling tide of criticism, often expressed as reluctant 'reservations', which has greeted *Jaws*, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, 1941 and *Raiders of the Lost Ark*.

All this is stranger when one takes into account the quality of Spielberg's commentary on his own work; most of it is lucid, wry and thoughtful. Few directors have been so candid about their intentions and methods; their influences or personal history. The profile which emerges from dozens of interviews is consistent and comprehensible: a sub-



Steven Spielberg directs 'E.T.'

urban middle-American childhood; an early love of making films and a special attachment to animation; mildly anti-establishment politics; and a slightly phobic character (the director will not travel in lifts and hates the water). Characteristically, he is self-deprecating about the normalcy of his upbringing: 'I've never been robbed; never been in a fight; never seen a corpse. Until I came to New York I'd never eaten Italian cooking' (*Time*).

Born in Cincinnati (and so giving

In England my earlier films, 'Duel' and 'The Sugarland Express', were highly regarded, and then with 'Jaws', 'Close Encounters' and 'Raiders' it was like I kind of sold out.—Steven Spielberg, talking to Andy Warhol and Bianca Jagger in *Interview* magazine

magazine editors an infuriating pretext for referring to him as 'the Cincinnati kid'), raised in Scottsdale, Arizona, the eldest child of a non-religious Jewish family, he was not much exposed to the cinema—the family thought it rather a waste of time. He first saw DeMille's *The Greatest Show on Earth*, though sometimes he mentions *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* as well. But he did not become a *matinée* addict à la Scorsese. Instead, much of his adolescence was spent making 8mm movies, at least one

T H E

Jaws was simply 'an enormously efficient fear machine'; *Close Encounters* a film of 'quasi religious uplift'; *Raiders of the Lost Ark* 'movie mongering of a particularly inane kind'. 'Have British critics been fair to Steven Spielberg?' asks **CHRIS AUTY**.

C O M P L E T E

S P I E L B E R G ?



'E.T.: The Extra-terrestrial': Elliott (Henry Thomas) regards the searchers.

of which reached feature length and was shown at a local cinema, recouping its cost. While he was still in his teens, his father, an electrical engineer, and his mother, a classical pianist, were divorced. Spielberg went to college in Los Angeles ('I was actually staying there so I wouldn't have to serve in Vietnam'), where he majored in English, not film. *Amblin*, a short made with the intention of breaking into the business, led to a job as a contract director at Universal TV, where his career included a *Night Gallery* episode with Joan Crawford; an early *Columbo* episode; and finally two TV movies, *Something Evil* and *Duel*. The latter's theatrical success in Europe (albeit in CIC's mangled version) helped (though did not in itself produce) the breakthrough into features that came with *Sugarland Express*. Despite Zanuck/Brown's hesitation at his youth, he was given the assignment to direct *Jaws*. The rest is history.

All this background is relevant. Critics have referred to Spielberg's 'encyclopedic knowledge of film' in order to characterise him as a kind of aesthetic magpie, on *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and *Close Encounters* in particular. But the director disavows those assumptions: 'We didn't have a good art house where I could see a Preston Sturges retrospective or a Frank Capra season; TV stopped at 10.30 and the test card wasn't all that compelling.' Asked for favourites, he seems always to return to Disney: 'I was more frightened by the 'Night on the Bare Mountain' sequence of *Fantasia* than by anything I ever saw in a movie before or since.' Apart from that, 'I'm not that prolific in film history,' he confessed in 1975, in a neatly American malapropism. At various times he has mentioned the influence of Ford, Hitchcock, Wellman, Capra, David Lean, Frankenheimer (for editing) and Kubrick (adoring *Strangelove*, cool about others: 'I like *Barry Lyndon*, but for me it was like going through the Prado without lunch'). But there are no great surprises; the mixture is predictable enough to include *Closely Observed Trains*, winner of a Best Foreign Language Film Oscar when Spielberg was twenty.

If his supposed knowledge of cinema history has been used to pigeonhole him as a director of pastiche, then his love of animation has been equally quoted to justify the argument that Spielberg is a puppet-master of emotions, a manipulator, a technician. This is part of the reasoning behind Lynda Myles' account of *Jaws* as 'an enormously efficient fear machine'. Spielberg's habit of meticulous planning and in particular the storyboarding of all his films goes back to the much loved *Duel*, for which he plastered a sequence by sequence breakdown concentrically around the walls of his motel room during the shoot. The pressures of a TV production (a 16-day schedule) made it virtually impossible to work in any other way. The director adds that on both *Duel* and *The Sugarland Express* he had all the scenes written out on IBM file cards so that he could leap from sequence to sequence without losing time.

It seems inconsistent, at the least, for Hitchcock's storyboarding to be hailed as an aesthetic virtue while Spielberg's is dismissed as an aesthetic vice ('It doesn't matter what it means in this kind of film-making; the relevant question is does it work?'—James Monaco on *Jaws*). There is a general objection to this, which any producer would point out—if one knew how to 'make' an audience react, investors would put their money into film rather than the Abbey National (or Chase Manhattan...). But there is a more particular objection, expressed by Spielberg in an excellent interview with Mitch Tuchman (*Film Comment*, 1978): 'Everything I do is for an emotional reason; it's not really a mechanical reason at all. I mean, that's what all film is: all the prismatic images in a motion picture are solicitous of a visceral response from people looking at the overall movie.'

Under scrutiny the movies bear that out. And so do Spielberg's working

methods, which are hardly those of a mechanic triggering off responses from some automated audience. 'I'm pig-headed about camera position and editing; beyond that I'm open to collaboration.' The extent of that collaboration has been very wide. On *Jaws*, much of the dialogue was improvised around scenes already 'composed' by several writers, including Spielberg, who finds writing a necessary but difficult and halting task. On more recent productions, despite his complete freedom now to work as he wishes, the director has surrounded himself with a close-knit group of collaborators and the writing has virtually become a collective process. It is as though the older, essentially private ground rules of 'writing' a film are being replaced by shared dreams, by 'visualisation', by a creative community which deliberately anticipates the collective dreamwork of the eventual audience. But this can hardly be called mechanical.



Richard Dreyfuss.

The theme is always the same: how the ordinary person transcends the limitations he expects to find and becomes a hero, a martyr, an adventurer.—Lynda Myles,

Michael Pye, *The Movie Brats*

Richard Dreyfuss is as close an actor to Spencer Tracy as exists today... Richard's easier to identify with than, let's say, Robert Redford.

Most of us are like Richard

Dreyfuss. Few of us are like Bob

Redford or Steve McQueen.—

Steven Spielberg

Spielberg's populism often recalls that of one of his favourite directors, Frank Capra (coincidentally, both of them have made crucial contributions to the fortunes of Columbia Pictures, Spielberg with *Close Encounters*, Capra with *Mr Deeds Goes to Town* etc). That populism has become a constant cue for criticism, especially since it seems to be expressed with a measure of mysticism. The great fear in *Jaws* and the great joy in *Close Encounters* have both been read in religious terms—the former as part of a punitive and sexually repressive Old Testament vision of human failure; the latter as some suggestion of the afterlife and transcendence.

When converted into aesthetic judgments, those readings warn against 'a script straining to become Herman Melville' (*Jaws*); against 'a blanket of awe-struck goodwill' (*Close Encounters*) (both from the *Monthly Film Bulletin*). The criticism is more serious because it applies to two hugely popular films; and the implication is clear: some operation of mass seduction, verging on deception,

has taken place. Quite apart from the questionable politics of damning populism generally (where does 'true' knowledge reside, after all?), there is a more immediate sleight-of-pen involved here: both *Jaws* and *Close Encounters* are speculations about public manipulation. Whatever the outcome, the crux of both films is that the age of mass communication has become an age of regular mass deception: in *Jaws* a community is deceived; in *Close Encounters* it is the whole United States.

To be fair to Spielberg's critics, they acknowledge this line of argument, but suggest that the apparent message is subsumed into a mystical fog which will still captivate the ordinary viewer. Part of the problem is a gap between American and European conceptions of 'the masses'. The latter, in which a Marxist notion of intellectual leadership still plays an important part, is the more apparently political. The former, fuelled by a kind of Jeffersonian liberalism, appears both bland and individualistic by comparison, apolitical. (This gulf plays a key role in the misunderstandings

of transatlantic film discussion, from *Cahiers* in the 60s to *Screen* in the 80s.) But isn't it unreasonable to accuse Spielberg in particular of a general tendency within American culture? And would we really prefer the lip-chewing, self-consciously liberal politics of a Martin Ritt, Sydney Pollack or Sidney Lumet?

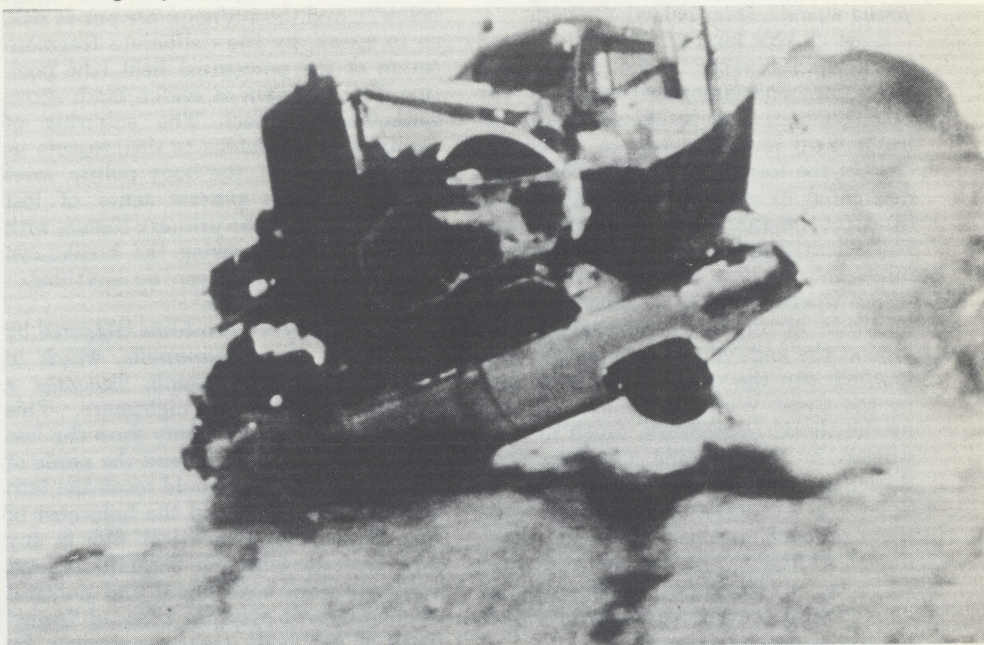
In any case, the transcendental elements in *Jaws* and *Close Encounters* themselves follow on from something else, which precedes them. Steven Spielberg is the poet of suburbia, and so, indirectly, of lumpen America. But the theme of his work is not primarily the story of Everyman's escape into the never-never. It is suburban life in all its contradictions, as a kind of mysterious lake of social and libidinal possibilities which have no direction in themselves.

'It all begins on Sunday—you take the car to be washed. You have to drive but it's only a block away. And as the car's being washed you go next door with the kids and buy them ice-cream at the Dairy Queen and then you have lunch at the plastic McDonald's with seven zillion hamburgers sold. And then you go off to the games room and you play the quarter games . . . And by that time your car's all dry and ready to go . . . and you drive to the Magic Mountain amusement park and you spend the day there eating junk food. Afterward you drive home, stopping at all the red lights, and the wife is waiting with the dinner on . . . and you sit down and turn on the TV set, which has become the reality as opposed to the fantasy this man has lived with that entire day. And you watch the primetime which is pabulum and nothing more than watching a night light. And you see the news at the end of that, which you don't want to listen to because it doesn't conform to the reality you've just been through primetime with. And at the end of all that you go to sleep and dream about making enough money to support weekend America' (Spielberg, interviewed by Dave Pirie).

Submission, fantasy, food, cars, pictures, sleep . . . There is criticism here, largely because Spielberg is talking about the background of his repressed hero in *Duel*, but there is more. This is Eden on the eve of the Fall. To the child it is a paradise of play, the largest Amusement Park ever built. To the adult it is a treadmill of prosperity, an endlessly incomplete dream of 'freedom'. Spielberg's films track back and forth across this divide between the two views, in a place without a name that is, subjectively, either heaven or hell.

'Weekend America' is the location of his movies but the result is no simple millenarian dream. Suburbia is a base for many excursions, from the 'political' statement of *Sugarland Express*, 'a film about the Great American dream machine that can transform two innocent people into celebrities', to the triumph of kindness and kinship in *Close Encounters*; from the communal fall from grace in *Jaws*, to the lonely child's redemption in *E.T.*; from the matinée movie fantasy of *Raiders*, to the mockingly ironic gags in 1941.

'Duel': 'Caught by the monster'.



In his visual education and from his professional training, Spielberg is a child of TV. And a TV rebel—after his first assignment at Universal he wasn't given any more work for a year. *Duel* is the portrait of TV Man, caught by a monster, the petrol tanker hunting him along the road, which he cannot understand and which he no longer knows how to fight. And *Sugarland Express*, based on the real story of a young woman kidnapping a Texas police officer in an attempt to regain custody of her child, might almost have been a TV special (an effect both heightened and denied by the casting of ex-TV star Goldie Hawn, who was required as a box-office guarantee before the movie could be financed). But the intensive marketing and runaway success of *Jaws* changed all that and shook the movie community. This single movie made more money for Universal than could ever previously

Each of my movies has shown enough humanity to allow an audience to identify with the person who is having the experience . . . I haven't made my 'It's a Wonderful Life' yet; I will some day. But in the meantime I wouldn't be satisfied with my films if there weren't human beings functioning as your guide through the world of mechanised madness.—Steven Spielberg

have been imagined, on a budget which, by the standards of some of the 60s flops (*Cleopatra*, *Waterloo*, *Mutiny on the Bounty*, *Tora! Tora! Tora!*) was still quite modest.

'Jaws': the night quayside.



In 'Jaws' the shark represents a disguised hatred of women and the preoccupation of our society with sadistic sexuality . . .—Jump Cut

In its first six weeks of release, one-eighth of the US population saw *Jaws*. In 78 days it grossed \$125m.

But Spielberg himself calls it 'a very small picture' and talks about it as a simple three-act thriller whose real complexity lay in improving on the book ('the only likeable character in the book was the shark, who ate all the trashy characters'), and in coping with the technical difficulties of a mechanical monster at sea. His summary seems fair. But the film has attracted outspoken criticism, primarily as an attempt to 'punish and outlaw sexuality' (Lynda Myles). *Jaws* is seen as an epic of misogyny, which begins with the killing of a young woman after she has made a frank sexual proposition during a night-time beach party, and which ends with the male trio (Roy Scheider, Robert Shaw and Dreyfuss) proving their masculinity by going out after the Great White shark. This rather loose Freudian analysis casts the shark as a castrating vagina dentata (from which men recoil in horror and disgust);

or as a raping phallus (attacking the young woman, from below). Or both.

Even on this kind of symbolic basis, I think there's more to the movie than that: the machismo/masochism of the Shaw character, his insistence on repeating a WWII naval tragedy in which the crew of the torpedoed *Indianapolis* were decimated by sharks, is portrayed as a disastrous sexual imbalance; the Dreyfuss/scientist figure, cast in a rather 'feminine' role, almost as a midwife in the scene where he guts a shark on the quayside at night, is threatened with rape at the end—the cage in which he is lowered into the water is battered open by the Great White and he is attacked by the shark, from below, much like the woman in the opening minutes. Only Scheider, terrified, hydrophobic (like Spielberg), constantly suggesting that they go back and get a 'bigger boat', finally triumphs over the menace. *Jaws* may be a Hawksian celebration of belated male courage; certainly no simple fantasy of rape or castration.

In any case, the film is far more interesting if the threat is understood as a more general fear of dissolution. The characters are threatened with bodily disintegration (who cannot remember childhood fears about swimming which stemmed from the separation of the

head, above water, from the body, below?); and the audience are put at risk, so to speak, by the deliberate fragmentation of the perceptual field (the position of the camera at sea/on land; above water/below water). The suburbia of Amity itself threatens to disintegrate as the town council, the body politic, loses its grip, and a general sense of lost control becomes the primary theme, with Scheider wryly mocking the breakdown when he remarks: 'I can do anything—I'm the chief of police.'

The memory of Hiroshima triggered by the tale of the *Indianapolis*, which in fact delivered the Bomb, becomes a cautionary historical nightmare. This movie, it suggests, can only show the loss of a handful of humans and the panic of a small town; but it should recall the tens of thousands killed and the holocaust of war. *Jaws* is not a 'political' film in any way; but its fable on community and authority does have moral and political implications. It plays on a fear of 'losing' parts of our body (taken, narrowly, by Freudians as castration), and so insists on the unity of experience and memory—from Hiroshima to Amity. Amity celebrating the 4th of July is part of the same America, the same national body, which dropped the atom bomb and sacrificed a generation in Vietnam.

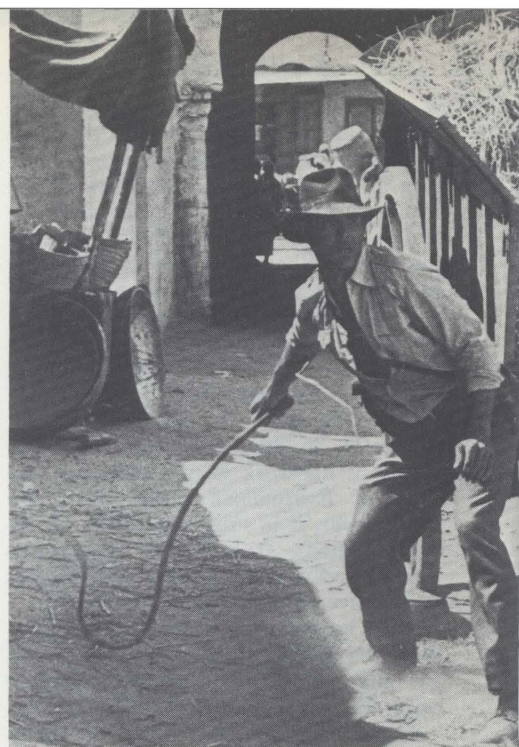
The dissolution of alienation in ecstatic feelings of community . . . — Susan Sontag, quoted by Jump Cut in an analysis of Close Encounters as a 'fascist' film

Only in the 1970s, with the elision of Left politics and anti-narrative aesthetics, could such a liberating film as *Close Encounters* be taken for a totalitarian dream. Forget for a moment the movie's clear attitude to authority (after Cambodia and Watergate, how can we trust the government?) and to conformity (the repressions of daily life). It is still incredible to think of *Close Encounters* being compared, as it was in *Jump Cut*, with Leni Riefenstahl's *The Blue Light* as a classic fascist text. For if *Jaws* dramatised social collapse and historical forgetfulness, *Close Encounters* is a kind of *Metamorphoses*; an inverted version of the 50s sci-fi; a testament to the fact that human dreams and social change can be realised without violence or death necessarily corrupting them in the process. Put into the animation terms so dear to Spielberg, one can see the film in the same (endlessly repeated) light as Tom and Jerry: Tom can be pummelled into a pancake, an iron, an extruded mousehole . . . without ever dying. Death, the final metamorphosis, is not the only one; human change is not disastrous.

Trapped in suburbia, haunted by an image which he cannot yet comprehend, the Richard Dreyfuss character is still able to reassure his tearful children at the dinner table: 'I guess you noticed

something strange with Dad. It's OK though. I'm still Dad.' Within the drama, in which his marriage is rapidly collapsing, that little phrase functions as a tender reminder of continuing parental love. To the audience it explains (almost literally) the sense in which *Close Encounters* is the exact inverse of a classic terror fantasy like *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*—in those nightmares of metamorphosis the body would remain apparently intact, but the human soul would vanish. Here, by contrast, the behaviour (even the body, time and space) may change, but the humanity of the dreamer is not destroyed.

It is not some transcendent revelation, nor the \$5m worth of special effects, which makes the finale of *Close Encounters* so moving; it is the rediscovery of the essential child within the man. Seen in real world (adult) terms, *Close Encounters* would be the minor tragedy of a working-class man who forsakes family, suburbia and sense. But in the child's eye perspective of the film, this is a story of liberation by dreaming. The dream frees the past to become part of an historical present (allowing the return of the kidnapped 'pilots from flight 19', played by Spielberg's writer/collaborators Hal Barwood and Matthew Robbins); it frees the sexual world and creates new families (Melinda Dillon temporarily adopting Dreyfuss to replace her 'lost' child; Dreyfuss becoming another child in the alien 'family'). One could hardly be further from the realms of submission, religion or control. On the contrary, in its own bulky and very American way, *Close Encounters* reminds me of the spirit of Vigo's *Zéro de Conduite*.



When adventure cinema was still a dominant genre, it left enough imaginary freedom to attract the greatest film-makers. They could then use it as a vehicle for their own concerns . . . But when the reproduction of the genre itself becomes the subject of a film, then there remains little space for the film-maker or for a creative dynamic. —Raiders of the Lost Ark, reviewed in Cahiers du Cinéma

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, both 1941 and *Raiders of the Lost Ark* have received rather shabby critical treatment. The former was found simply 'unfunny'. Nothing more articulate was required, since the film did so badly that the critics felt vindicated: it had cost \$26.5m, of which a staggering \$14m was provided in non-refundable guarantees by exhibitors. The latter was considered a rather wearisome exercise in genre imitation ('It's the kind of picture that Sam Wood, Victor Fleming, John Farrow or Michael Curtiz would have done'—Spielberg). Some of the resulting reviews, like the *Cahiers* one quoted above, are endearingly paradoxical: films which play on genre aren't themselves genre films (at least, not in any ordinary sense). And as for that tortuous redefinition of auteur status, in which Michael Curtiz somehow exercises more artistic control than Spielberg. . .

There's a disparity between the critical understanding of Spielberg's recent work and the sense in which it works for an audience. Of course *North by Northwest* hovers somewhere in the background of *Close Encounters* with its helicopter spraying chase and native Romantic version of Mount Rushmore. But that is not why a largely under-25 audience is



excited by both scenes. The threat from the air in both films hinges on a disturbance of normal perspective: the aerial attack breaks through the barriers (or threatens to) which normally edit the visual field into long shot/medium shot/close-up. Similarly, *Raiders* has often been mentioned in the same breath as the Republic serials—again, unseen by the overwhelming majority of its audience (not to mention *Kiss Me Deadly* from which the image of the Ark as Pandora's Box itself, jokily, seems to derive). But the playful mockery of reality in both films, the extraordinary plastic sense, is immediately clear to an audience, and a source of hilarity. *1941* is Tex Avery's Roadrunner cartoon drawn large: the Acme company which in the cartoon supplied raw materials for every kind of destruction has supplied Hollywood in its entirety for demolition. From the moment we see the two kids dancing as they dishwash, and smashing the occasional plate, we know that the destruction will escalate to incredible proportions. Because *1941* is slapstick, comedy of excess.

Raiders is more ingenious, a thriller whose principals are given the indestructibility of Tom and Jerry: Harrison Ford is chased by a racing boulder (three cuts make clear that he is almost under the thing), but he escapes; Karen Allen is blown up, but magically survives; best of all, the German U-boat submerges with Harrison Ford clinging on and in a later sequence he is still miraculously there. Popeye! Whatever one thinks of the sources, the humour or the technique, this amounts to more than 'movie mongering'. For it returns us to the magical essence of storytelling in the cinema: based in our absolute conviction, when they are on screen, that characters exist; and on our refusal to believe that when the camera cuts away, they die. It is less moving here than in *Close Encounters*, because the immediate subject is already taken from cinema rather than life, but the delight in metamorphosis is the same.

In several interviews given during 1978, Spielberg mentioned a new project, provisionally entitled *After School*, to be made on a low budget (\$1.5m, at the time), 'about what happens when you are 8-14 years old, and what you do between leaving school at three and having dinner at six.' Now, four years later, and costing some \$11m (still only \$2m above the average Hollywood budget of the last year), he has brought us *E.T.: The Extra-terrestrial*. This modest fantasy is an extraordinary mixture of recapitulation and fresh exploration, a fable offering a kind of cinematic equivalent to Blake's 'Songs of Innocence'.

As an immediate description of the movie (about a child harbouring a friendly alien from human predators until it can rejoin its own kind), *Variety's* catchy summary is good enough: 'the best Disney film Disney never made.' But it would be impossible to imagine a Disney treatment in which the lonely kid suffered from the separation of his parents (one wonders to what extent the film in that sense is autobiographical). In some ways, *E.T.* is an inversion of *Close Encounters* which begins with the child rather than the man; instead of the father drawn away by a dream of rediscovered innocence, this is the story of a child pushed by a sense of abandonment and solitude to establish a new family through which to grow.

The movie inverts *Close Encounters* more obviously, too. Where the earlier film was considered grandiose, this is intimate (relatively restrained special effects; a domestic scale of action); where the earlier film was criticised for presenting the aliens in its final sequence, *E.T.* trumps that by featuring the alien as a central dramatic figure (who plays with the dog; learns to speak; gets drunk; and delights the kids with a display of levitation). For that alone, *E.T.* is a triumph of Spielberg's plastic imagination, creating delicate moments of character and intricate emotion using Carlo Rambaldi's extraordinary E.T. model.

The paradox of this ultimate artifice is that the real subject is not, of course, E.T., but the child, Elliott (E...t). Without proclaiming itself, the result is a very moving experiment in form—the child discovers himself, and we discover the child in ourselves, through a companion who has no sex (Spielberg claims that the child actors referred to it indiscriminately as 'he' and 'she'); no age (or rather, none that falls within ordinary understanding); no existence outside the film, in the real.

On paper that may sound rather chilling. But as a dramatisation of childhood, it is true and affecting—Elliott's E.T. lives in the clothes cupboard, along with, but distinct from, his toys. The creature is not simply a figment of imagination, which is a central difficulty in the curiously parallel Spielberg-produced film *Poltergeist*, where the relation of childhood fantasy to adult objective fears remains awkward and uncertain. By combining the world of child dreams (secret friends in the closet; a magical creature)

'Jaws', 'Close Encounters', 'Sugarland Express', are not the films I would have made five years from now. . . As I find myself caring more for people, the people around me, the people whom I love, my family, I find my films get much more personal, much more emotional. I think that I'll be a good film-maker when I eventually can make that turn and deal with that material and start with a problem and let the personal problem create the excitement.

—Spielberg, 1978

'E.T.' is the closest film to my own sensibilities, my own fantasies, my own heart, 'E.T.' is my personal film. —Spielberg, July 1982



'E.T.': Spielberg's modest fantasy.

with the adult assumptions of daily suburbia (school, divorce, biology lessons), Spielberg's new film takes us a long way further than Disney.

The director already has several more projects in the pipeline (*Raiders* Part 2; a portmanteau film to be made with other directors, including John Landis; a remake of the 1942 Spencer Tracy movie *A Guy Named Joe*, provisionally entitled *Always*; a Manhattan musical to be done with Quincy Jones. . .). One hopes that on the strength of *E.T.* they will be treated with a revived critical respect. For this 'small film' about life 'after school', with its play of childhood memory, film fantasy and breathless wish-fulfilment, has restored cinema to its right place—as the wellspring of dreams.

Six years after 'The Man Who Fell to Earth', Nicolas Roeg and scriptwriter Paul Mayersberg have been working together again on a new film, 'Eureka', starring Gene Hackman, Theresa Russell and Rutger Hauer. Here Paul Mayersberg talks to TOM MILNE.

PAUL MAYERSBERG: The project started from reports of an incident in the West Indies during the Second World War. A man was very brutally and rather strangely murdered. He would have been a relatively obscure figure had it not turned out that he had made an amazingly rich gold strike during the 1920s. We began to think about this story of a man who had found what he had been searching for, wondering how it came about that twenty years later he should meet such a violent death.

The story seemed different from the usual legendary tales of men who make huge gold strikes, and then lose all their money or the girl they love. This was a man who appeared to lose nothing except his life in an apparently unconnected way. He found the gold, the dream came true. He married, had children, bought an island in the Caribbean, and would have seemed to all intents and purposes a satisfied man. Then, one night, he is murdered. Why? The trial which followed assumed that the murder must have had to do with his money in some way. But we began to feel that the story was not so much about the money the gold strike brought him, but about the fact that he found the gold at all.

We created a character for whom the discovery of gold was everything. He is not a young man. At that time about

forty, he had been looking for gold for fifteen years. To discover it at his age was to think, 'Fine, and now what? I shall go on...' But he does not 'go on'. Something gets in the way which leads to his destruction twenty years later. He does not feel a sense of completion after the moment of ecstasy. He doesn't lose the money the gold brought him. He doesn't lose anything really... except of course his life. This is the story of the aftermath of his discovery. Most of the classic stories, like *Greed* or *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, end with the loss of the gold, blown away as dust. *Eureka* wonders what happens to a man who keeps the gold, yet still is blown away as dust.

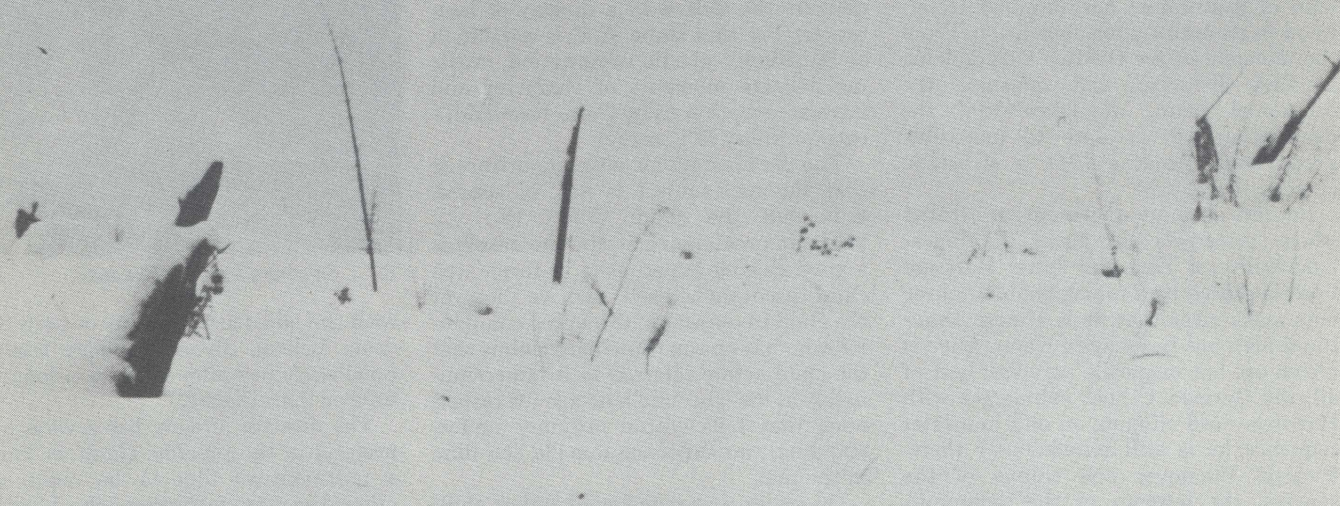
The romantic tradition, I think, is that if a man is to achieve what he sets out to do, he either achieves it very young, and then promptly dies, like James Dean or Schubert, or he achieves it at the end of his life and then dies. Either way, death follows artistic achievement in a neat conclusion. We have a man who achieves what he wants in the middle of his life, and then has no place to go. He assumes, as anybody would, that after the gold life will become more interesting, more exciting. That's not necessarily so, not in life. What he does is to achieve the ecstatic moment associated with the end of life right in the middle of it. Jack McCann is

like most of us. He has an awkwardly shaped life.

So the film is constructed in a way that matches this. That is to say, in the first part we see Jack McCann finding his gold, achieving his aim, reaching his point of ecstasy; and then we switch to the last few weeks of his life. We do not describe how he reached his state of depression, of anger, of frustration: you understand that as you go through the last period of his life. Watching a man's life in this way, you fill in the gaps. You begin to see who he married, his daughter who has now grown up, the son-in-law he doesn't like, the business partner he doesn't need. He wants nothing. But people now want things from him. He is surrounded in the middle part of the film by people who want things. They are now, in a way, where he was all those years ago.

So each of the characters—and it's really like a family circle—wants his own gold. They want their moments of discovery and ecstasy, whether it's finding the right man, making the right deal. What Jack McCann can't fully understand is why they come to him for that. The reason, and they themselves don't know it, is because he has done it and they haven't. At least not yet. They don't want his money exactly. They want to know his secret. Orson Welles prefaced *Mr Arkadin* with a quotation about a king who once asked a poet, 'What of all that I have do you want?' And the poet wisely replied, 'Anything, sire, except your secret.' What the characters now surrounding Jack McCann on his island in the middle of nowhere, during a war in which they play no part, what they most want is his secret. He begins to believe they must want his soul.

The film is about what people really



EUREKA

want in life. It is not money that most people want, it is that moment of discovery we have generically called *Eureka*. I've found it! I've got it! The film describes what happens to them if they get it, and what happens to them if they don't, hinting at the possibility that they may be luckier if they don't get what they want. Again, the Truman Capote line about answered prayers. The gold, in other words, has nothing to do with fortune in the sense of money; it has to do with destiny.

TOM MILNE: Your story has presumably evolved away from any historical facts?

The war is a fact and that's the background. Our characters are fighting their own war. It's a film with many levels. We started out, really, with two words: there is a murder, and there is a mystery. Nic's working title was originally *Murder Mystery*. The clues to who murdered this man lie in the man himself, rather than in the people around him at the time of his death. In a way they represent his state of mind. The point is that Jack McCann carries his own story with him. It is as if he is set on a course which he only recognises bit by bit. Jack's tragedy is that he's not an artist, so he can't exorcise his demons through art. He is just a man who wanted something. So in his inarticulateness he becomes one of us, in a Conrad-like sense. He is at home on his island, and he is an outcast at the same time. It's not primarily a question of who killed him but of why did he die? The crime is such that it doesn't even look as if it was done by one person. Our point simply is that it doesn't matter in the story of a man's life who did what to whom. What matters is what in the man himself led these circumstances to come about.

Given what you have said about liking to write in images, do you use focal images for each part of the film?

It goes back to the first two words: 'Murder', because without the murder Jack McCann would just be one of the few prospectors who became very rich and died asleep in their beds. So the first word heard in the film is 'Murder'. What follows is the word 'Mystery' at the end of the first part, the part that takes place in Canada. We only have the word 'Murder', which is shouted on the side of a glacier, and the word 'Mystery', which is whispered by a dying clairvoyant. Those words amount to images; like the gold they recur through the film. Jack himself doesn't interpret either word; they were just utterances. Later we begin to see the significance. Every scene has a murderous intent. And it has a mysterious intent. A discussion about a relationship, where someone casually says 'Do you want to kill him?', hints at murder. During the love scenes between the daughter and son-in-law there is a sense of murder and a sense of mystery too. Why are they together, two more unlikely people you could not imagine? So when a relationship comes to a crisis point in the story, you begin to wonder, will it end in a death, or will it remain a mystery? Or both?

At the heart of the film, we have both the murder and the mystery which has been anticipated in every scene so far—

but of course we haven't been able to see it clearly until then. The film is imbued with the fact that all murders are mysteries, and they are mysteries for a very simple reason. And that is, no one person ever does it. Take the most random killing, a mugging in New York, an old lady is killed by a Puerto Rican youth. You can say, well that was random, she was murdered, he did it. Yes. But look at their lives and you will find out why he came to kill that woman and why she came to be murdered. It is impossible to find anywhere on earth a truly random event. And the events that do take place, take place under the stars.

There are many scenes where the characters look up at the stars, look round, there is a sense of a world outside a world, a universe in which these characters are playing roles. If you say, ah, then you're saying that everyone has a destiny which they can't avoid, that's not true, because there are warnings: you are told, and you don't heed them, or perhaps you do. If you heed them, you tend to live a very safe life; if you don't heed them, you live a more dramatic life. If you can't even hear them, then you're on a course of blindness and deafness like most of us, and so you sail through life, and it's only at the end of your life, maybe even seen through someone else's eyes, that you realise there was a pattern.

What Nic is saying here is that, once you have decided where you want to go



'I took Balzac as a model, because it seemed to me was as close to a truth as any

who you want to be, then you are set on a course, if you really mean it. If you get off, that's all right. But there comes a point when you cannot get off, you've gone too far. Or perhaps you don't want to get off. It's either too comfortable or too exciting or too dangerous or too expensive—you can't get off. And what this film is about is characters who are embarked on courses that they can't easily change. The drama is that we begin to see where they are going while they don't. And then they do but they can't change their partners. So, broadly, the film is about a personal kind of astrology.

In other words, the making of gold has forever been the alchemist's dream: how do you make gold? The answer of course is that you can't. As a matter of fact gold was made, I think two or three years ago in California, but it cost 75,000 times the cost of the gold to make it. So gold is an immutable thing, it's an element, and we're stuck with it. Everybody wants gold. You want a wedding ring. Gold is the prover, the identifier. It's the magic solid-liquid potion that we all look for. Sometimes it comes in human form, and a person is *your* gold, your alter ego, your lover, the person without whom you would die. It might be a place. It doesn't matter what it is. And it's in this sense that *Eureka* is about gold.

But because gold is an element, because it cannot be reduced, there is a hard core at the basis of all human behaviour that can't be argued about in a psychological way, only in a chemical way, and even then not properly. The characters find that there are certain things in their lives that are irreducible. You cannot say it was the fault of this or that. It wasn't. It was because of a desire for gold. And your desire for gold is ultimately, I suppose, your desire for self-realisation. Not self-discovery, because you can get the gold without knowing a damned thing about yourself. The desire for self-realisation: that is the element that is irreducible in human behaviour. *Eureka* looks superficially like a psychological drama. In fact it's a magical story, because it strips away the psychology to get down to the hard bedrock of the seam of gold in everybody's nature.

Does Jack McCann hear the warnings?

Oh, he hears them, he doesn't understand them, he's mystified. His life is one we would like to think would be saved if he were an artist. He has no outlet for experience. In other words, his moment of ecstasy, his years of despair, and his final death, have no artistic representation. He doesn't build anything. He doesn't write something. He doesn't paint a picture. He feels that there is nothing he can do with his experience except experience it. It's that naked. But I think that's probably everybody's

problem. And that the artist in us is in a way an evasion of the fact that we don't like coming to terms with our lives. If we're lucky enough to have a gift, or a religion, it enables us to get out of the real problem, which is living with ourselves and our wants and desires. But these characters are not artists. Their lives are their art, if you like, fumbling though they may be.

So we are trying to deal in terms of the basics of human behaviour, going back, as it were, before the notion of the unconscious. Going back to a time before the excuses or the reasons. And that goes with the whole idea of dealing with people not as figures in a psychological landscape, but figures in a universal configuration.

Are you implying that a person finding the gold in his life would be more likely to recognise it if he were an artist and could express his awareness of his discovery?

No, that's not an implication. My analogy of the artist is to explain that we are not dealing in that way in terms of the characters. If Jack McCann were an artist, in my view, he would be more likely to evade that self-realisation: the art would be a sort of get-out. He would divert his energies from the truth,

because the truth, as Shaw said, is seldom pure and never simple. Artists tend to elevate observation to a level which passes for truth: the real truths of life are unfortunately in the way we live, not in what we create. Not a nice thought.

Then is eureka, the gold, the recognition of it, akin to the unconscious, what is inside the mind?

No. When I said it was before psychoanalysis, the designation of the unconscious, I meant that . . . In a Shakespearean world one would talk of humours or about the elements as inhabiting the body, even the astrological signs of fire, earth, air and water. It is thinking about people in that way. Of course there are sons and daughters, mothers and fathers, families. But the emphasis on understanding human beings through the family is inadequate. Human beings are just as well understood when they are alone. And since people have an amazing capacity to exist alone in the world, this is a film which deals with people in terms of their aloneness, and their composition in alchemical properties, in an early chemistry of fire, earth, air and water, seeing them in that way rather than as victims of a society and pressured by their families or even



that his view of greed as the root of human behaviour Freudian or Jungian analysis.'

the war. The family relationships are the foreground of the story, if you like, but they are not ultimately the theme. The theme is the irreducibility of human character. The unconscious is a notion which is reductive, because it suggests that you can arrive at an understanding of it through psychoanalysis, hypnotism, drugs; and *Eureka* resolutely denies that you can reach the bedrock of a character through those means.

The mystery remains?

The mystery remains. Jack McCann's daughter so closely resembles him that she might be him. She has every aspect that is his, almost nothing of her mother. It happens that way sometimes. In other words, you could take a Mendelian view of the characters: this daughter happens to be more than a chip off the old block, almost a soul-mate, so there are two people in the world who are almost identical. They don't resemble each other in a physical sense, but they act and think alike. At root they belong together. Now that is not psychology. It might be genetic, and that again precedes any notion of the unconscious. We are trying to look at characters and relationships in a way which reduces them to their elements.

In this I took Balzac as a model, because it seemed to me that his view of greed as the root of human behaviour was as close to a truth as any Freudian or Jungian analysis. Now, what's fascinating about Balzac's work is that, as he grew older and his novels developed, he leaned more and more towards the occult. There seems to be a connection between greed and the occult—and by the occult I really mean the unknown or unacknowledged elements in life, I don't mean witchcraft exactly. Although what is demonic possession if not a form of greed? The subject of greed in novels like *Le Père Goriot* or *Eugénie Grandet* led eventually to the occult in *Ursule Mirouet*. It seemed quite natural for Balzac to move from depicting a society so material in its ruthless quest for gold towards an occult, mystifying, even mystic vision of people's behaviour and their relationships to each other.

So I tried to look at people for the way they are, the way they would seem if they were small children. When a child tells you he doesn't like another kid at school, he doesn't have a psychological reason, it's because the kid hit him, or was rude to him, or he just doesn't like him, and there's almost no further to go. It's chemistry. And this is a story constructed, in

human terms, as chemistry. It is like Goethe's elective affinities; it's looking at the world after the medieval period, in a young scientific period, as it were.

Is there a danger in this irreducibility, of your characters being reduced to mere humours, in the Jonsonian sense?

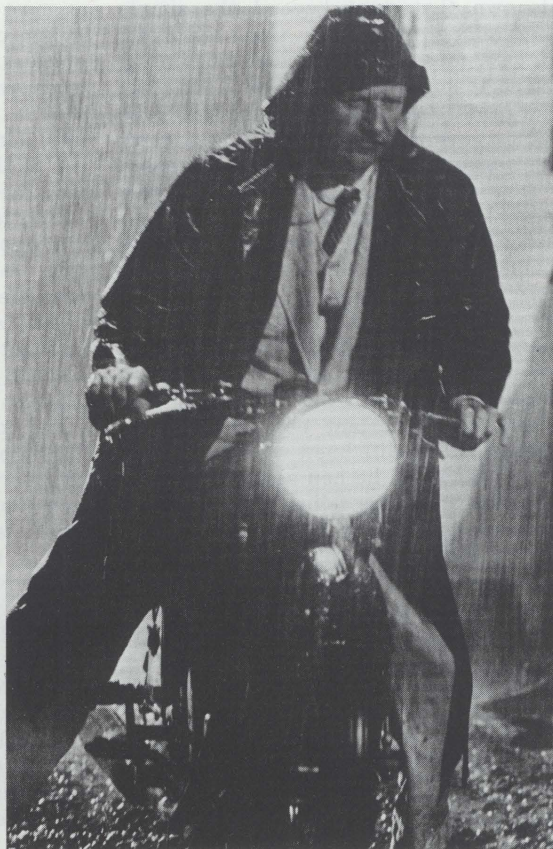
You mean made too simple and therefore untruthful? Not at all, because what happens is that you see a man who is one minute very generous, the next minute incredibly mean, one minute quite gentle and affectionate, the next minute violent and crazy, yet it is one man. What happens is that, in him, the war is going on between the elements of which he is composed. That's not to say that family relationships don't help determine our lives. But when you get down to a man alone, and his ability to succeed, fail, survive, live with himself or other people, you come down to an essential element in his character which you have to admit exists. You can't argue reasons for it, it just is so. That is not simple-minded. Kafka said don't look into the abyss because the abyss looks back at you. That's the point. People avoid doing that. The psychological approach to character is often an attempt to avoid facing the truth.

I presume, given Roeg's usual practice, that the two parts of the film are not strictly divided?

No. The first part is twenty minutes, but it is not a prologue. It's the beginning of a process—the German word for trial. When Nic first proposed this story to me, he had one image in mind. Just one. And that was a scene where Jack McCann and his daughter are sitting in a car, many years after the gold strike. He had been showing her where it all happened. As the car drives off, he looks out of the window and sees the icy peaks of his earlier days. When she looks out of her window, she sees a shining blue sea, the Caribbean, which is where they live now. That image was the origin of the film. One looks back, the other looks forward. They are both in the same place at the same time.

You obviously talk the same language as Nic Roeg, but there can't be many directors with whom this happens. Do you find this frustrating as a screenwriter?

Well, I have written many screenplays, some of them originals. I have not had any luck in getting these made. They are often commissioned, bought, optioned, but for various reasons they don't get made. I can only conclude that there is something common to them which makes them difficult for anyone who is not of a similar mind. I can't say, obviously, that Nic and I are always of the same mind, but we do have a very similar way of thinking about things. That's probably



Left: the McCann 'family' on their Caribbean island: Jane Lapotaire, Gene Hackman, Theresa Russell, Rutger Hauer.

Above: Gene Hackman as Jack McCann.

'American cinema starts out with the notion of where to begin at a crisis and find

why we work well together. But in the collaboration there is no compromise. The film is Nic's, not mine. The screenplay paves the way for the film.

There must have been over a thousand pages of *Eureka* in order to get down to 120. I have been writing it for two years. We have gone through all the permutations. In most relationships between directors and writers there is a time limit set because time is somebody's money. In all that time I was never not writing *Eureka*. There were periods of intense writing, and there were periods of thinking, then periods of consideration when the project was being looked at by the studio, then periods of inactivity. The plan was to produce a screenplay where Nic could go and make *his* film without worrying about problems that should have been solved earlier. One thing about Nic is that he has never replaced a writer on a screenplay. That comes from loyalty and real conviction about the film he wants to make. In *Eureka* many of the images you'll see were suggested by me. And many of the lines of dialogue were suggested by him. I think that is perhaps the most interesting aspect of the work, a long and ongoing process, and that if something has to change, neither of us has much vanity about it.

What you have been describing is a collaboration. The more usual function of a screenwriter is to supply a script, having no say in how it changes or is filmed. Was this the case with *The Disappearance*?

The Disappearance was based on a novel by Derek Marlowe called *Echoes of Celandine* which I read, I think, in 1971. I optioned it myself with a view to writing and directing it. I wrote a screenplay but could get no interest, primarily because of the number of flashbacks, which was felt to be uncommercial and/or incomprehensible. When I relinquished that condition of directing the film, it made no difference whatsoever. Eventually I let the option lapse, having written two versions, and rather gave up on it.

Then, after *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, a friend of mine, Stuart Cooper, said he had some money to start work on a film. He liked this subject, and I rewrote it with him. At that time we were going to make it in England. Then there was some French money in the offing, and I rewrote it as an English-French co-production. Finally the only way we could get the money fairly swiftly was with a Canadian-English co-production. So I rewrote the film for Canada, and we set the first part in Montreal. Somewhere in the middle I wrote a version set in Florida.

Although I didn't think so at the time, we were getting close to shooting the deal as much as the screenplay. I can't remember exactly what the film cost—

about a million six, a million eight dollars—but it was inexpensive and it was completed in six weeks in both countries, including the studio work at Twickenham. John Alcott had worked with Stuart before, and he's very fast and very good. That helped enormously, but the time pressures were really horrendous, and they translated quickly into money pressures which meant cuts. What happened in the end was that Stuart unfortunately had to skip some scenes because he was shooting at what amounted to television speed. We believed we could do it, and we did it.

In retrospect I think perhaps certain things were lost which I'm sure Stuart regrets as much as I do. At the time I didn't regret anything. I was concerned with helping to get the thing done in the most adequate way I could. And I didn't think of it as inadequate. I still don't, in a way. But the particular area in which it was weakened, I think, has to do with the images. We could not afford to shoot the many close-ups, the details which take as long to light as the master shots. So we were left with scenes that were absolutely true to the script, but occasionally skeletal. I have a feeling that in a story as romantic as this was meant to be, we were missing the images which would have allowed the film to acquire a life of its own that went beyond the simple storytelling bareness that emerged. Ravel's music was my clue, a haunting piano theme which is almost a tune but not quite. *The Disappearance* was to be almost a story, but not quite. In a word, impressionism. The discovery of memory.

The pity was, so many images were never shot. For instance, there is an early scene where Donald Sutherland comes home to find his wife missing. He goes into the bathroom and sees the bath full of water. In the script, he pulls out the plug and as the water which is milky with bath-oil runs away, we see that at the bottom of the bath there is a gun. This scene was important because it would mean that his wife knew what his profession was, which he had assumed she did not. She would be telling him in a code that she knew he was a hit man. There didn't seem any way, on the day at Twickenham, to shoot that in the time available: to have him leave the bathroom for the several minutes the water takes to drain away, then come back, find the gun, and react with appropriate flashback. So it was omitted.

In a sense it's a minor thing. We learn later that she knows what he does. But I have a feeling that this scene as written—and there are others, all small things but important when taken together—would have told you something. It would have shown that this man knows that his wife—or indeed any woman, since it's a completely unfemale thing to do—would never leave bathwater in the bath: after

nine years of marriage, the fact that the water was left there would be a message. Similarly, I had an idea to have nine pictures in an arc over his bedhead, each picture was one year of their marriage; so that if you panned across them you would see how much older one or the other had grown, that there were no children, and so forth. It would graphically present their relationship. Now that again meant that nine pictures would have to be taken... Small things, but they would have given you the atmosphere of decaying romance that this film was about, and would have led you more easily into acceptance of the past scenes as a romantic dream. And the dreamlike nature of this man's life, the fact that he doesn't face the significance of what he does, would have been seen more clearly. The film was harder edged than I had envisaged, more thriller-like.

In general, you see—and I'm not referring now to *The Disappearance*, which was a special case—what I like to do is something that most directors reading scripts don't quite understand. Most directors immediately blue-pencil what is widely regarded as filling material. Most of what I write in the context of what becomes art direction on the floor is not filling material at all but part of the complete pattern which is as important as most dialogue. The images are clues. A film can only be understood in terms of clues. Somebody gets off a bus, you learn who they are because of what they're carrying, what their hair looks like, and so forth. Images are the clues not to the story so much as the characters, their inner lives.

Contrary to popular opinion, film is not a good storytelling medium, it never was. In the beginning, if you take Lumière, it was just incidents, the magic of film. Almost immediately, film became explorations of landscape in the Swedish cinema, epic visions in the German, *cinéma pur* in France. Everybody cottoned on to the fact that stories were not film's best form. Ford—and you can't get any more conservative than John Ford—said that the best way to start a movie was to take a short story, because movies had a way of expanding rather than contracting things. To begin with, in the cinema, they had ideas. Films were made out of ideas. 'Let's go and do one of those... She comes in, and then we'll decide later.' All film comedy is ideas. They didn't worry about the story except in the most basic outline. I think the reason narratives came in *as* narratives was when films started to talk, because then they used plays, and after that in the mid-30s there seemed to be stories to tell. But all the stories have been told in books. And that's something we haven't properly grasped, I don't know why, the fact that film is not chiefly a narrative medium, it's chiefly a dream medium.

you are going . . . European cinema tends on the whole out where you will end up.'

Is this perhaps because the function of the scriptwriter evolved so that he became the provider of the story?

Yes. Scriptwriters spend their lives adapting stories from another medium, and that is something which beleaguers film. It struck me, years ago when I was writing criticism for *Movie*, that nobody ever bothers about the story in musicals. Yet when Fellini makes a film which is musical in the sense that it has people coming on and doing their numbers, it is regarded as self-indulgence. When you look at a Fred Astaire movie, you say, why can't movies be like that any more? But they don't have stories. Fred Astaire defies gravity. To a great extent film is about just that: defiance.

Is this concern or lack of concern with story the main difference between *Rosemary's Baby* and *Don't Look Now*, two films whose remarkable similarity in plot went unnoticed? *Rosemary's Baby* has a strong, driving narrative, whereas *Don't Look Now* is more concerned with theme, is slow in the sense that Bresson is slow, Dreyer is slow.

I think there is an essential difference between European and American cinema. American cinema, like American life, is based on somehow knowing where you are going, having an aim. It's a kind of pioneer spirit. The characters begin with an aim. They go through difficulties and achieve or don't achieve that aim. That's the story. European cinema, dealing with the same kind of subject matter, tends to take the view that aims are not the essence of life or of storytelling. Perhaps because it's an older set of cultures, I don't really know, it is not the end of the journey that matters in European cinema, it is the excitement of the journey itself. American cinema starts out with the notion of where you are going. European cinema tends on the whole to begin at a crisis and find out where you will end up.

I think you see that clearly in *Don't Look Now* and *Rosemary's Baby*. The characters in *Don't Look Now* do not know where they are going. The characters in *Rosemary's Baby* have a very clear idea. They get frightened en route, but they know she is going to have a baby . . . Now, there's nothing of that in *Don't Look Now*, the film ends when the child dies, you've no idea what's going to happen next. It's a major difference. The end of the journey is indigenous to American art. The European vision of exploration is, you do not know what you're going to find. Of course, Columbus landed at the wrong place. And they named the country after the other fellow. Funny, isn't it? They never talk about him.

Was this perhaps one of the problems with the reception given to *The Man Who Fell*

to Earth, in that the Tevis novel did have a strong narrative purpose, which you removed?

Wait a minute. No one who saw the film, except the critics, knew the book. In essence we didn't change the story. As Newton stays enjoying the Earth, being seduced by various aspects of it, whether drink or sex or love or even power, so do we. That seems to be in perfect keeping with the theme. And as he realises, I've got to go now, so we say, oh yes, he's got to go, now where's he going? He's going back. Then he's stopped. I think the narrative line, if you like, is fairly exact in relation to Newton's life. When something reminds him on Earth of his planet, he remembers, and we understand. As he fears that if he stays he will die, then he puts all his energies into going back. So I think the form of the film is an exact correlation to his state of mind.

Yes, I was simply talking of audience expectations. Would audiences have found the film easier to understand if you had explained in narrative terms that his people would die if he didn't discover a source of water?

The problem is that I'm not sure there are narrative terms. The critical assumption that we took a narrative and turned it upside down is quite understandable if you read the book. But it presupposes that strict narrative terms exist in the first place. There is nothing in the story to suggest, even in the first three reels, that Newton has a purpose beyond needing money. In other words, I'm not sure that narrative was 'obscured'. In the film there is no narrative purpose to begin with. None. It was a tale of adventure. He did come to visit Earth, a planet of water, because his people lacked water. He can't take the water back. What the alien comes for is another life, a look at another life, and the fact is that life is a one-way ticket. The purpose of anyone who goes anywhere is to find out what's going on there. It doesn't mean you don't miss home, or you don't want to go back, but you go further on the journey. What's your purpose? Your purpose is to find a new land, maybe report back, maybe go back, maybe stay. What was the Spaniards' purpose in going to South America? Well, they were going to find gold, Eldorado. But most of them didn't come back, and didn't want to.

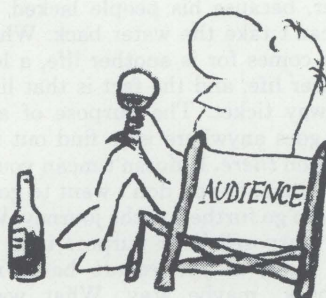
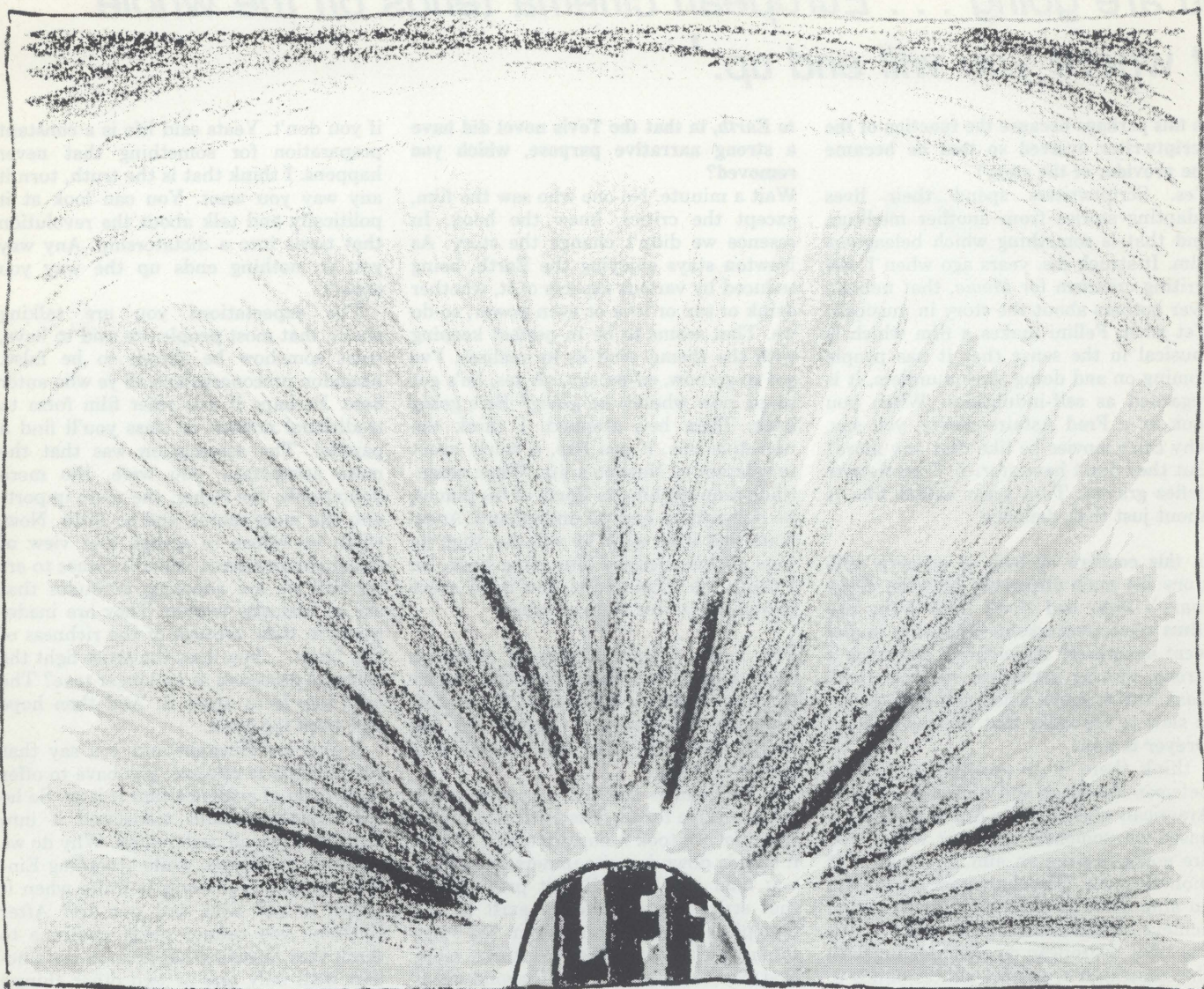
In *Eureka*—there aren't many parallels with *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, except perhaps a certain concern with a cosmic connection of things—the beauty of *Eureka*, and I think it is a beautiful notion, is that the man sets out to find what he's looking for, and he's very specific, and he finds it, albeit by slightly magical means, and he's fulfilled, and that's it. But that's not it. In other words, if you find it, it's not it. If you don't find it, it's not it. Damned if you do, damned

if you don't. Yeats said life is a constant preparation for something that never happens. I think that is the truth, turn it any way you want. You can look at it politically and talk about the revolution that turns into a dictatorship. Any way you go nothing ends up the way you expect.

The expectations you are talking about, that most people are said to have, must somehow be shown to be false. Abandon preconceptions all ye who enter here. Perhaps if you refer film form to traditional notions of class you'll find a parallel. The assumption was that the more aristocratic you were, the more honourable, the richer, the more important, the more moral, and so forth. Now, while we refuse to accept that view of social circumstance, when it comes to art we find we are adopting attitudes that are as basically untrue. They are inadequate in their account of the richness of life. Now . . . how does the artist fight the thing he perceives as no longer true? The only way is to upset it. And then hope and work for proof.

If you are Einstein and you say that the universe is relative, you have to offer some form of evidence that it is so. So he did. Mathematicians translated it into terms that we all understand. Why do we continue to believe, while accepting Einstein, that the universe is finite when it comes to our lives and our art? After Einstein, you cannot really continue to think that anything happens in conjunction with only one or two other things. Everything happens in conjunction with everything else. If you accept this, you must apply it. If you still believe the world is flat, that's fine, you can go on making flat earth movies as most filmmakers do. But if you believe that the world is round, then you'd better adapt to that. If you believe that time is parallel matter, then you have to think and feel differently, you have to.

Film, which coincided with the theory of relativity, is one of the most malleable forms in dealing with space and time. It's easier to consider space and time with film than with sculpture or painting or even music, which traditionally aim at timelessness. The point about film is that it is not timeless; it is without time in the sense of historical or biographical chronology. It's not timeless like Rembrandt's portraits of old age. That's timeless, as good now as it was then. Film is very often timely, good for today, as a sort of chart of fashion. But it was born without a concept of chronological time. What Nic Roeg has done in *Eureka*, I think, is to give relativity a human form. It's a drama of discovery, the way discovery changed attitudes and feelings and lives. The assumption is that after a discovery nothing can ever be the same again. It's a man's life, pricked by a moment of magic.



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REVENGE OF THE JEDI

When the newscaster on Radio Three announced the death of a well-known German film director on 10 June, I said to myself, oh yes, it must be Douglas Sirk. So when it turned out to be Rainer Werner Fassbinder, it came as a shock. I was surprised, but after a few seconds thought I realised—to use a distinction much favoured by Henri Langlois, one of Fassbinder's greatest admirers—that although surprised, I was not astonished. It could have been foreseen: Fassbinder had long been on a collision course, and suicide (if it was that) or an accidental overdose was only to be expected.

I heard the news from a car radio and all during that day's drive from Crianlach to Carlisle I went over the fourteen years since I first became aware of Fassbinder's existence. It began in Munich in 1968, when Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet showed me their film *The Bridegroom, the Actress and the Pimp*.

ern American milieu unconvincing and more than a little silly. It was only with my third Fassbinder film—*Pioneers in Ingolstadt*, shown in the Directors' Fortnight at Cannes in 1971—that I realised he was a major figure, not only on the German scene but in world cinema. So reluctant was I to accept the evidence of my eyes and ears that I remember going back to see it a second time; only then was I sure. I invited the film to the 1971 New York Film Festival, the first time any Fassbinder film had been shown in the States.

The theatre was not full, and the reviews were not very good, but a number of people came out impressed with the film, and particularly with an unknown actress called Hanna Schygulla. The film featured other players who were to become part of the Fassbinder stock company (Irm Hermann, Harry Baer, Klaus Löwitsch); the photography was by Dietrich Lohmann and the music by Peer

von Kant, would have dispelled them. By this time what the Germans call his *Thematik* was clear: Fassbinder was primarily concerned with micro-politics, with power relationships between people on the most intimate level.

I once came across a book which purported to present the thirty-five basic plots: my favourite category was Biter-Bit, and that seemed to apply to many of Fassbinder's films. They were sado-masochistic scenarios in which often the exploiter ended up as the exploited. Not all his films fell into this category, but most of the best of them did, which made me begin to wonder a little about Fassbinder's private life. I knew that he claimed to be a proletarian, and he certainly did his best to dress and act the role, but I then discovered that his mother (his doctor father had walked out when Fassbinder was a little boy) was the official German translator for a number of American writers, notably

Rainer Werner Fassbinder

BITER

Fassbinder starred in it, playing the *louche* pimp, Freder, who in the play-within-the-film supplies a dilettante countess with the Veronal with which she eventually commits suicide; he also plays a pimp in the framing story. The play-within-the-play was a Straubian 'digest' of Bruckner's *Sickness of Youth*, the rights to which had been bought by Fassbinder's Anti-Theatre group for possible future production. Straub had actually directed Fassbinder in the stage version and had then filmed it.

It was perhaps unfortunate that I had seen the Straub film, because when Susan Sontag and I saw Fassbinder's first film, *Love Is Colder than Death*, at the 1969 Berlin Film Festival, I remember complaining in writing that this young director had attempted an impossible amalgam of Straub and Godard and it hadn't worked. I was so annoyed by his 'copy' of Straub's long tracking shot along the Landsbergerstrasse (a notorious prostitutes' hang-out in Munich) that I was unable to appreciate what was new and different in Fassbinder. Susan Sontag, on the other hand, although she didn't like the film that much, predicted that here was someone we had to keep an eye on. But when I saw his *Whity* at a 'market' screening in Berlin the following year, I found its portrayal of a South-

Raben. I still think it was one of his best films. Unfortunately it has not been much seen, because the author of the play on which it was based, Marie Luise Fleisser, was so upset by the changes Fassbinder had made that she refused to let the film be shown commercially anywhere.

Perhaps if I had seen the other eight of the ten films which separated *Love Is Colder than Death* from *Pioneers* (in the space of three years), I might have appreciated Fassbinder sooner. On the other hand, what I had seen of him personally had rather turned me off: when the festival audience in the Zoopalast (where *Love Is Colder than Death* was shown in competition) booed his appearance on stage, Fassbinder had carried on like a victorious prize-fighter, arrogantly strutting back and forth, hands linked above his head, pretending that he was being cheered, not hissed.

It was not until *Pioneers* that he succeeded in getting away with his high-style parody of operatic sentiments, his weird blend of melodrama and realism. Until then, I had not been sure whether he was directing and writing this way on purpose. But there were no doubts after that film. Even if there had been, the next two works, *The Merchant of Four Seasons* and *The Bitter Tears of Petra*

Truman Capote. This didn't sound like a proletarian background.

Fassbinder had been married to one of the stars of his repertory company, Ingrid Caven, but he soon made no secret of his homosexuality. This became clearer with each film: in *Fear Eats the Soul* it was easy to see that the relationship between a much older woman and a Moroccan stud was a metaphor for Fassbinder's sexual relationship with the actor who played the Moroccan. Fassbinder was probably younger than the Moroccan, but he was clearly identifying with the role played by Brigitte Mira. Then, with *Fox*, we had the reverse situation: Fassbinder himself played the role of the working-class boy exploited—after winning a lottery—by his upper-class lover.

Normally one doesn't discuss the private life of film directors, but since Fassbinder himself gave us such a chilling glimpse of that life in his segment of *Germany in Autumn*, presumably he felt that it was significant. The story of his love affair with Armin tells us a lot about Fassbinder's themes; it also may tell us something about his death.

As the Fassbinder entourage explained to me, Armin had been a butcher's boy (see *In a Year with 13 Moons*, with its slaughterhouse scenes), and Fassbinder had taken him up—and out of the



butcher's shop. They lived together for years, but the difference in their social class created problems. Fassbinder felt (see *Germany in Autumn*) that he was exploiting Armin; but when, after a number of years, he began to grow tired of him, he was tormented with the problem of how to end the affair. After years of *le high-life*, he couldn't send Armin back to the butcher shop with a Dear John letter. Yet that is precisely what he did. During the 1978 Cannes festival he wrote to Armin in Munich that the affair was over and that he didn't want to find him in their flat when he returned. He didn't: neighbours discovered the decaying body first. Armin had committed suicide. The following year Fassbinder made *In a Year with 13 Moons*.

My first social encounter with Fassbinder occurred when he finally accepted an invitation to come to New York in 1975 to present *Fox*. A dinner was arranged at a restaurant near Lincoln

bill, and all of us began to wonder whether the dinner was ever going to end. Fassbinder, however, seemed to be enjoying the whole scene.

After Fassbinder had given up his search for the Real Right Place, he settled in Berlin for a few years, and every Berlin festival was enlivened for me by an invitation from him either to dinner or to a private screening of a just finished film. But between dinner and the film, there was always the ritual stop at his flat so that he could cut generous lines of cocaine which were then offered to everyone there. And everyone usually came to at least ten people. The entourage was necessary to Fassbinder's well-being or indeed his self-confidence; cocaine seemed to be part of the daily routine. He was not the only film director who indulged in cocaine, but he was the only one I knew who made a way of life out of it, and the physical signs of this addiction soon became all too apparent.

BIT

Richard Roud

Center. All through drinks and the first course he refused to look at me, always speaking sideways (and he didn't say much, only responding to direct questions), never looking at me straight on. He was obviously sizing me up, deciding if I was OK (whatever that meant to him). By the time we got to the main course, he had shifted his body round so that he was facing me, and by the time coffee appeared, he was actually talking directly to me. In spite of, or doubtless because of, his outrageous bravado, he was a deeply suspicious and shy man.

Later, when he moved to Paris (an abortive move, for although he bought a flat in Montmartre, and had it decorated by Peer Raben, he hardly lived there and sold it after little more than a year), we saw each other more often. I remember him inviting me, Daniel Schmid, Barbet Schroeder and Bulle Ogier for dinner at the Closerie des Lilas. Perhaps in an attempt to instil self-confidence, Fassbinder had given Armin the money to pay the bill. But Armin was so ill at ease that every time the waiter brought the bill he would say, 'And two more rum and Coca-Colas.' Whereupon the waiter was obliged to take back the bill in order to add on the extra drinks. When he returned, Armin would order more rum and colas, the waiter would take back the

The last time I saw Fassbinder was after the 1982 Berlin festival screening of *Veronika Voss*, when I told him how much I liked the film. He smiled and said only, 'I, too.' He thought of films like *Maria Braun*, *Lili Marleen* and *Lola* as necessary evils—the films he had to make to pay for the ones closer to his heart and his preoccupations. *Maria Braun* was supposed to pay for the losses incurred by *13 Moons* and *The Third Generation* (and it certainly did). *Lola* and *Lili Marleen* were to pay for a film he was not to live to make: *Cocaine*, an adaptation of a once notorious Italian novel of the 20s. I never got a chance to ask him about what turned out to be his final film, *Querelle de Brest*, an adaptation of Jean Genet's novel.

Fassbinder made more films a year than any important director since the silent days in Hollywood. In the fourteen years of his film-making life, he directed over 38 films—including the 13-hour *Alexanderplatz*. A good dozen of them count among the best films of the 70s, and his place in film history is secure. He burned his candle at both ends, and it did not last the night; but at his best, he made a lovely light. How satisfying that his last film to be released before his death was a masterpiece like *Veronika Voss*.

DOUBLE TAKES

ALMEREIDA, successor to QUINCANNON, files a first despatch on video censorship and Hollywood cuts, record investments and encyclopedic errors.

Weather formations

The recent decision to certificate videotapes, or rather to issue guideline categories and descriptions of their contents, obviously suits both the British Videogram Association and James Ferman, the British film censor. For the BVA it's a case of cleaning up the image of video in general, which has come to be equated with exploitation material. And for the censor, it's a case of being saved by the bell. The recent tendency of London's independent cinemas to convert to club status (especially after the Williams Committee report) has only been the last in a series of waves which eroded the non-statutory authority of the British Board of Film Censors during the 70s.

In the last few months I gather that several police forces in the North have been raiding high street video shops, seizing material and phoning the Board to ask whether or not the material in question has been certificated. If not, the retailer has been threatened with prosecution under the obscenity laws. Given the boom in video (there are now 2.5 million sets in Britain), this suggests that censorship will have clawed back some lost ground after a decade which saw both *Ai No Corrida* and *Salò or the 120 Days of Sodom* enter British exhibition under the 'gentleman's agreement' of independent cinema club rules—rules which have since protected sexually explicit material such as the Kuchar brothers' *Thundercrack* (first brought through British customs, I remember, in a 16mm can which carried the description 'Weather formations over Nevada and the south-western United States,' but omitted any mention of gorillas, bananas, KY jelly and the other 'props' featured in the film).

There has been no wave of protest at, for instance, the decision to prosecute *The Driller Killer* and other gore titles; which is perhaps unfortunate, since it means that a precedent has been set without any of the public debate that surrounded the censor's treatment of Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* or Louis Malle's *Pretty Baby* in the late 70s. But one doubts the effectiveness of the new code in any case. *The Driller Killer* is still available in dozens of London video shops; and other titles (such as *Mother's Day*) originally refused certificates for theatrical release are now on sale too. Piracy has already given the video retail business such a semi-legitimate reputation that one doubts whether the occasional prosecution will deter the sale or rental of unclassified titles.

Of course it is chilling to watch an audience cheer the rapists in *Death Wish* (as I once saw at a late-night screening in

Hampstead); and almost as disturbing to watch spectators urge on Travis Bickle in the climactic massacre of *Taxi Driver* (though the intentions of the two movies could not be more different: the former intends and achieves an exploitative aim; the latter simply fails to pull off an attempt at cutting irony). But the problem is that the criteria of censorship have remained so vague, as Roger Corman reminded James Ferman with some amusement when talking about the 'banning' of his LSD movie, *The Trip*, during a lecture at the National Film Theatre last year. Certainly, without some systematic explanation of the hows and whys of censorship, it's hard to see the recent alignment of the censor's views and those of WAVAW (Women Against Violence Against Women) without feeling that there's an element of opportunism involved.

The confusions of purpose in censorship seem to have found a suitably ironic expression with the recent case of *Not a Love Story*. This Canadian feminist documentary against pornography, originally due to open as part of the Women Live month in May, was initially refused a certificate because of the pornographic material which it 'quoted' in order to make its point. After much heart-searching (and, it seems, some argument between the secretary and the rest of the Board of Censors), the film was given an 'x' certificate when one brief, legally required, cut had been made. But the debate about the film's content was given a final bathetic twist in a discussion

which followed a women-only screening at Canada House. Reluctantly at first, but with increasing vehemence, members of the audience told the woman director, Bonnie Sherr Klein, that the film's anti-pornographic stance was overwhelmed by the 'quoted' images; finally, she was accused directly of herself creating pornographic images which should not be shown to men or to mixed audiences at all. Of course, this agreement between some radical feminists on the one hand and the more illiberal strand of censorship on the other shouldn't encourage us to draw some easy moral. But it suggests we're no nearer achieving a consensus on visual messages and our identification with them; or on the relations of morality and sexual politics. Unless, that is, we're talking about such popular 'rubbish' as *The Driller Killer*. Hmmm.

Promotion

One of the least mentioned and potentially most important areas of our ailing film business is publicity and marketing. In his Winter 1981/82 edition of this column, Quincannon exposed the neglect of *Heaven's Gate* and by comparison the publicity overkill surrounding *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. Historically, Wardour Street's press offices have been overworked, underpaid and understaffed—over the years only Fox can claim a consistent record of intelligent press promotion. But the last year has seen some evolution in the PR jungle.

The amalgamation of United Artists, MGM and CIC (Universal/Paramount) at the beginning of the year led to the condensing of two press offices into one, and the redundancy of some UA personnel. But before that, and one



'Thundercrack': no mention of gorillas.

suspects in anticipation of it, the independent film PR agency Dennis Davidson Associates had suddenly absorbed more staff: the core team of UK Advertising (with their firm views on how to handle journalists and 'manage' coverage); and Fox's long-standing press officer. But all was not well. Tempers at DDA became frayed as the new faces arrived, despite the move to larger and more glamorous offices in Soho; and the new MGM/UA/CIC giant (UIP), despite the huge volume of films it was now handling, decided to restrain costs by offering as little work as it could to the outside agency. Subsequently DDA shed some of its longest-standing staff and began moving into new areas—such as music publicity—where they are apparently making considerable headway.

The consequence of all this movement is a little hard to characterise, though it accounts for the intelligent promotion of awkward titles like *Body Heat* and *Shoot the Moon* in recent months. The ramshackle old order is on its way out. But it will be interesting to see if the new order is genuinely more adventurous, and not simply more chic.

Babylon

Tales of Hollywood Babylon are too current for anyone to be surprised at the continuing 'creative' interference of producers in films (though the shorter version of *New York, New York* in fact seems to me a better film; and the shorter version of James Ivory's *The Wild Party*, well, less bad). But there have been some amusing examples of the practice in recent months:

●Lewis Teague's *Fighting Back*, originally scheduled for a massive US release

alongside the summer contenders, was apparently re-hacked and then effectively dropped by studio executives worried that its story of an Italian community setting up vigilante groups to combat black crime might upset all the ethnic groups involved. Its British release, under the title *Death Vengeance*, has taken the increasingly common pattern allotted to films disliked by the American parent company. It was wave-released with no preparation at the quietest time of year, despite the fact that recent British events in Toxteth and elsewhere might have been used to give the film a British topicality.

●John Lydon (Johnny Rotten of the Sex Pistols) has revealed that Mike Wadleigh's *Wolfen*, an intriguing but uncommercial urban monster movie with curious echoes of Jacques Tourneur's *Cat People*, was originally going to have run three hours and featured a large proportion of newsreel footage (as well as a Lydon soundtrack). However sneakily, one is grateful to the executives who stepped in.

●Most recently, during her visit to London *New Yorker* film critic Pauline Kael offered an example of the old story absurdly reversed. Director Herbert Ross, it seems, had the right of final cut on *Pennies from Heaven*. Despite the pleadings of producers and backers, at the last moment he cut whole sequences from the film, including a particularly fine production number set in a flop-house during which the accordionist grieves for having murdered the young girl. According to Kael, 'It had a marvellous Brecht/Weill resonance. And with those cuts generally the film feels truncated, the continuity strained, and some of the characterisation weakened.' It may not explain the film's commercial failure, of course, but one wonders.



'Nutcracker': Joan Collins to bring back the Old Days?

Record money

Cannes 1982 was full of talk of the British film renaissance, what with four films in competition and *Chariots of Fire* becoming the most successful British film ever released in the US. Back in London, though, the euphoria might never have existed. A distributor friend who had just emerged from the Rank building in Wardour Street sounded the first sour note. 'It's the atmosphere of death up there,' she said. Certainly there is something a little desperate in the sight of Rank's top management posing for the cameras of the trade press on the set of Euan Lloyd's xenophobic *Who Dares Wins*, and with Joan Collins on her new film, *Nutcracker*—as though a dash of patriotism and a whiff of titillation might bring back the Old Days, and with them the audiences. When the Cinematograph Exhibitors' Association then announced their £½m campaign to promote cinema-going (a campaign to be funded by a 'mystery' backer, Rowntree MacKintosh, who have subsequently pulled out of the scheme), a journalistic acquaintance who specialises in exhibition remarked sarcastically that only six months before Rank wouldn't let him talk to their theatre managers lest he discover the extent of the rot. Now they couldn't publicise it enough. As producer/impresario Michael White summarised: 'Of course the system will change, but in a typically English way—by things becoming virtually impossible first.'

On the Channel 4 front, the picture is also not as rosy as it once seemed. Their commitment to producing films is not in question; in fact, characteristically, the budget has been overspent and some cutbacks have apparently had to be made. But at the time of going to press the Channel is still dithering over the crucial question of theatrical release for its films. Although Colin Gregg's *Remembrance* received a brief cinema release, Neil Jordan's far superior *Angel* (a Wenders-ish fable set in Ireland) seems unlikely to make it on to the big screen in this country.

Even independent cinema, which until the spring had escaped the general



'Not a Love Story': women only.

DOUBLE TAKES



Bleak City: Bertrand Tavernier on location in Glasgow for 'Death Watch'.

economic frost, is threatened. During Cannes it was clear that some independent exhibitors who would normally have been doing rapid business were hardly buying at all. Then in July the Gate 3 Camden Town closed. And the shape of the deals for independent cinemas has changed. The long-awaited primacy of video is finally here: both Herzog's *Fitzcarraldo* and Beineix's *Diva* have been released simultaneously on the big screen and on cassette, and the purchase of both titles was guaranteed by a large financial commitment from the video, rather than the theatrical, distributor. It now remains to be seen, of course, whether subtitled 'specialist' video can overcome the resistance of the retail dealers and find a large enough market to compensate for the loss of cinema audiences.

In all the celebration surrounding *Chariots of Fire*, one crucial point seems to have been forgotten: the continuing difficulty of raising production capital from UK sources. Puttnam's film (from which, incidentally, his profit participation will make him a millionaire several times over) was backed by American and Arab money, not by the City. Coincidentally, Puttnam is on the board of directors of Goldcrest, the most active British film finance company by a long chalk: they backed *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman*, *Gandhi*, *Enigma* and the forthcoming *Mandrake*. But even after the success of *Chariots of Fire*, this subsidiary of the Pearson Longman publishing group has only been able to raise two-thirds of the £12m it was seeking as production capital from British sources.

Against this rather gloomy background, finally, it's amusing to see outsiders rushing in where veterans fear to tread. This year's boom in the British record business seems to have infused its young moguls with a mysterious love of the cinema. Richard Branson of Virgin has announced production plans; Chris Blackwell of Island Records has already committed \$2.5m, producing *Country-*

man and backing *Ils Appellent ça un Accident* for Nathalie Delon. And Terry Ellis of Chrysalis is producing Harley Cokliss' new \$2m science fiction film, *Contagious*. But none of these soft-spoken and discreetly hard-headed men seems to have a clear reason for gambling their music profits in such a fickle lottery. In Cannes, however, Terry Ellis gave a clue: 'As the record business has grown, Hollywood has refused to accept that it really exists, although we are in show business, and despite the remarkable example of someone like Robert Stigwood.' So that's it! But hurt pride and the fatal lure of West Coast glamour are hardly the best reasons for going into the risky business of film production.

Glaswegian

After the popular success of *Gregory's Girl*, the weight of expectation that hangs on Scottish film-maker Bill Forsyth is obviously enormous. But on the location of *Local Hero*, this 'new' director who spent ten years in documentary remained as diffident and self-effacing as ever. Here, culled from interviews during shooting, are a few of his more laconic observations:

●On being Scottish: 'The English I think are a strange people. Sometimes I look at them and they seem actually more exotic and strange to me than any other race in the world. A lot of what they've done through history makes them even more *foreign*, you know. Perhaps because of the violence that the Empire had in it. I think the English are a very violent race—and just because you're among them, sometimes you don't realise it.'

●On Glasgow (his home town) in the movies: 'The French, funnily enough, have used it twice: Tavernier with *Death Watch* and Resnais with *Je t'Aime, Je t'Aime*. But the way he got it in was that

the heroine had died in Glasgow before the movie started! And they just flashed back to this dingy little boarding house, with a policeman coming to tell the hero that his girlfriend had died in the river. It was quite quaint to see what Glasgow meant to him, and to Tavernier too: just a very stylised version of Bleak City.'

●On the sources of inspiration for his new film: 'It's like many things; but I feel close in spirit to the Powell and Pressburger feeling—the idea of trying to present a cosmic viewpoint to people but through the most ordinary things. And because both this film and *I Know Where I'm Going* (1945) are set in Scotland, I've felt from the beginning that we're walking the same... treading the same water, I mean.'

Credits

The publication of Ephraim Katz's *International Film Encyclopedia* (Macmillan) two years ago was generally greeted as a Good Thing. Its huge range of reference (7,000 entries and worldwide coverage) and sober commentary made it a vast improvement on existing, parochial works of reference like Halliwell. But two years of use have revealed some flaws. No doubt the publishers have already been flooded with errata notes from film buffs, but here is a short catalogue of selected slips. Richard Rush is credited with both *The Shooting* and *Ride the Whirlwind*, although both films are also listed and commented on under their correct authorial heading—Monte Hellman; Steven Spielberg is listed as having attended film school when in fact he majored in English and subsequently worked in TV; Nelly Kaplan's filmography includes two titles that were not only never made (*Le Satellite de Venus*; *Au Bonheur des Dames*) but both are in fact variant titles of the same project; similarly, Polanski's *What? (Che?)* is also listed, under a later date, by another title, *Diary of Forbidden Dreams*.

Of course these small errors inevitably creep in and it seems unfair to nit-pick with such a useful reference book. But there's a more general awkwardness in the selection of entries. It seems surprising that a dictionary which lists Paul Morrissey or Ulu Grosbard has no space to mention directors like John Milius, Tobe Hooper, Jonathan Demme, John Landis, Larry Cohen or Wes Craven. One suspects a certain misguided defensiveness against youth or cultishness. The book's general bias in favour of cinematographers and directors and against scriptwriters has also taken its toll: neither Robert Towne (*Chinatown*, *Personal Best*, *Greystoke*) nor Bo Goldman (*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, *Melvin and Howard*) gets a mention. Readers might like to send in their own observations/suggestions, and we will forward them to Mr Katz in New York.

ALMEREIDA

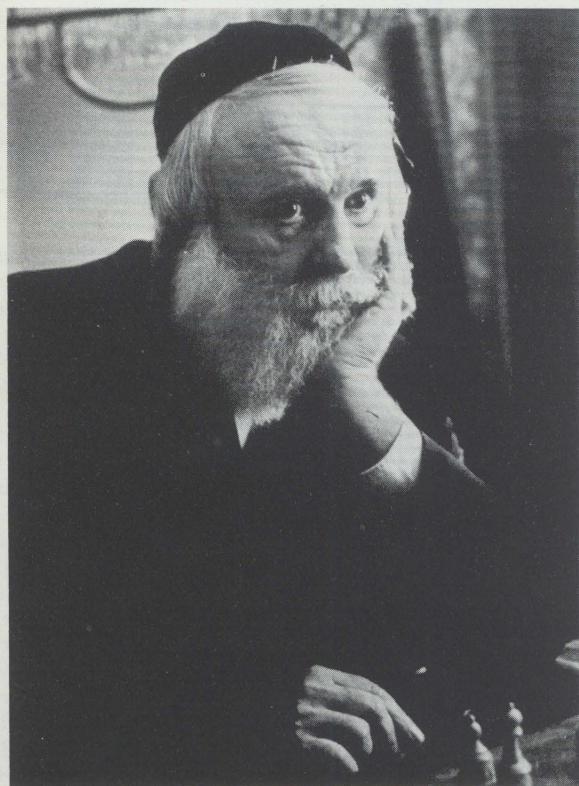
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1896

STEPHEN BOTTOMORE introduces the first British film critic. This remarkable article, titled 'The Cinematograph', has as far as we know never previously been reprinted.

THE FOLLOWING ESSAY, credited to a certain O. Winter, appeared in the magazine the *New Review* in May 1896. Since the first cinema show in Britain took place in February 1896, it must have been written little more than two months after the new sensation had been introduced to the public. It is undoubtedly the first extended essay on the subject to be published in Britain and the first anywhere in the world in which films were held up to sustained criticism.

Most writers of the time were delighted with how *real* everything seemed: the waves on the seashore, the people bustling about the railway platform. They did not stop to think whether this was a good thing or not. But for Winter, the problem with the cinematograph is that it is not realistic in the true sense, essentially because it reproduces nature without selection. (He goes on to lay the same fault at the door of photography, over-realistic Pre-Raphaelite painting, Zola's novels and, with characteristic British chauvinism, the whole of American art.) His essay is an early contribution to what was to be characterised as the Lumière/Méliès antithesis: the straightforward recording of reality versus Méliès' 'artificially arranged' scenes. The interesting thing is that Winter was writing well before cinematic practice had established this dichotomy *de facto*: months before Méliès had clearly shown

that the cinema could be a vehicle for fantasy and years before the development of editing made precisely the selection of shots an integral part of film-making.

Winter considers that the cinematograph has no artistic future but may have some value as a means of recording history. This was to be a common view in the late 1890s; many people (for instance, Boleslaw Matuszewski) prophesied the use of film as a 'living' archive of contemporary history; few thought that it would become the leading means of mass entertainment. Indeed, it was with some audacity that the *Photographic News* averred as late as April 1898: 'So far, little has been done to tell a connected story or narrative by means of animatography [cinema], and probably the idea is capable of considerable development.'

So who was O. Winter? Unfortunately, we do not know. It would seem that he wrote only one other article (also for the *New Review*, February 1896), about the National Portrait Gallery. Despite much research I have been unable to discover his identity: either he did indeed write only two articles, though the authority of his style would suggest otherwise, or 'O. Winter' was merely a pseudonym for his contributions to the *New Review*. Perhaps one of the readers of *SIGHT AND SOUND* could help to solve the mystery of Britain's first film critic?—S. B.

AIN'T IT LIFELIKE!

LIFE IS A GAME played according to a set of rules—physical, moral, artistic—for the moment ironbound in severity, yet ever shifting. The heresy of today is tomorrow's dogma, and many a martyr has won an unwilling crown for the defence of a belief, which his son's boot-black accepts as indisputable. The tyranny of the arts, most masterful of all, seldom outlasts a generation; time brings round an instant revenge for a school's contempt of its predecessor; and all the while science is clamorously breaking the laws, which man, in his diffidence, believes to be irrefragable.

When the first rude photograph was taken, it was already a miracle; but stability was the condition of its being, and the frozen smirk of an impossible tranquillity hindered its perfection. Even the 'snap-shot', which revealed poses indiscoverable to the human eye, was, at best, a mere effect of curiosity, and became, in the hands of Mr Muybridge and others, the instrument of a pitiless pedantry. But, meantime, the moving picture was perfected, and, at last, by a skilful adaptation of an ingenious toy, you may contemplate life itself thrown moving and alert upon a screen. Imagine a room or theatre brilliant with electric lights and decorated with an empty back-cloth.

Suddenly the lights are extinguished, and to the whirring sound of countless revolutions the back-cloth quivers into being. A moment since it was white and inanimate; now it bustles with the movement and masquerade of tremulous life. Whirr! And a train, running (so to say) out of the cloth, floats upon your vision. It draws up at the platform; guards and porters hustle to their toil; weary passengers lean through the window to unfasten the cumbrous door; sentimentalists hasten to intercept their friends; and the whole common drama of luggage and fatigue is enacted before your eyes. The lights leap up, and at their sudden descent you see upon the cloth a factory at noon disgorging its inmates. Men and women jostle and laugh; a swift bicycle seizes the occasion of an empty space; a huge hound crosses the yard in placid content; you can catch the very changing expression of a mob happy in its release; you note the varying speed of the footsteps; not one of the smaller signs of human activity escapes you. And then, again, a sudden light, and recurring darkness. Then, once more, the sound and flicker of machinery; and you see on the bare cloth a tumbling sea, with a crowd of urchins leaping and scrambling in the waves. The picture varies, but the effect

is always the same—the terrifying effect of life, but of life with a difference.

It is life stripped of colour and of sound. Though you are conscious of the sunshine, the picture is subdued to a uniform and baffling grey. Though the waves break upon an imagined shore, they break in a silence which doubles your shrinking from their reality. The boys laugh with eyes and mouth—that you can see at a glance. But they laugh in a stillness which no ripple disturbs. The figures move after their appointed habit; it is thus and not otherwise that they have behaved yesterday and will behave tomorrow. They are not marionettes, because they are individuals, while a marionette is always generalised into an aspect of pity or ridicule. The disproportion of foreground and background adds to your embarrassment, and although you know that the scene has a mechanical and intimate correspondence with truth, you recognise its essential and inherent falsity. The brain and the eye understand not the process of the sensitive plate. They are ever composing, eliminating, and selecting, as if by an instinct. They work far more rapidly than the most elaborate mechanism. They discard one impression and take on another before the first has passed the period of



EXPERIENCED.

Cyrus Fayson (on his way home after having a good time in the city): "Whistle away, dern ye! Ye can't fool yer Uncle Cyrus. I've seen them kinettyscope pictures before."

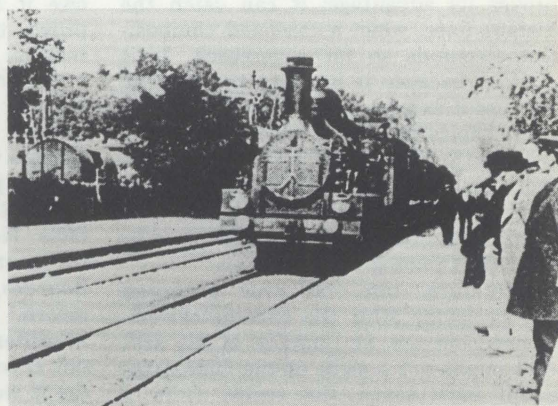
its legitimate endurance. They permit no image to touch them without alteration or adaptation.

The duller eye, the deafest ear, has a personality, generally unconscious, which transforms every scene, and modifies every sound. A railway station, for instance, is a picture with a thousand shifting focuses. The most delicate instrument is forced to render every incident at the same pace and with the same prominence, only reserving to itself the monstrous privilege of enlarging the foreground beyond recognition. If you or I meet an arriving train, we either compose the scattered elements into a simple picture, and with the directness distinguishing the human vision from the photographic lens, reject the countless details which hamper and confuse our composition, or we stand upon the platform eager to recognise a familiar face. Then the rest of the throng, hastily scanned, falls into a shadowy background. Thus in the moving picture, thrown upon the screen, the crowd is severally and unconsciously choosing or rejecting the objects of sight. But we find the task impossible. The grey photograph unfolds at an equal pace and with a sad deliberation. We cannot follow the shadows in their enthusiasm of recogni-

tion; the scene is forced to trickle upon our nerves with an equal effect; it is neither so quick nor so changeful as life. From the point of view of display the spectacle fails, because its personages lack the one quality of entertainment: self-consciousness. The ignorant man falls back upon the ancient wonderment. 'Ain't it lifelike!' he exclaims in all sincerity, though he possesses the faculty of comparison but roughly developed, and is apt to give an interpretation of reality to the most absurd symbols.

Here, then, is life; life it must be because a machine knows not how to invent; but it is life which you may only contemplate through a mechanical medium, life which eludes you in your daily pilgrimage. It is wondrous, even terrific; the smallest whiff of smoke goes upward in the picture; and a house falls to the ground without an echo. It is all true, and it is all false. 'Why hath not man a microscopic eye?' asked Pope; and the answer came prosaic as the question: 'The reason it is plain, he's not a fly.' So you may formulate the demand: Why does not man see with the vision of the Cinematograph? And the explanation is pat: Man cannot see with the mechanical unintelligence of a plate, exposed forty times in a second.

Left: The first American cartoon about the movies, published in the comic journal 'Judge', 20 February 1897. Below: 'A train floats upon your vision'; 'a swift bicycle seizes the occasion of an empty space.'



Yet such has ever been the ambition of the British painter. He would go forth into the fields, and adjust his eyes to the scene as though they were a telescope. He would register the far distant background with a monstrous conscientiousness, although he had to travel a mile to discover its qualities. He would exaggerate the foreground with the clumsy vulgarity of a photographic plate, which knows no better cunning, and would reveal to himself, with the unintelligent aid of a magnifying glass, a thousand details which would escape the notice of everything save an inhuman machine. And while he was a far less able register of facts than the Cinematograph, he was an even worse artist. He aimed at an unattainable and undesirable reality, and he failed. The newest toy attains this false reality without a struggle. Both the Cinematograph and the Pre-Raphaelite suffer from the same vice. The one and the other are incapable of selection; they grasp at every straw that comes in their way; they see the trivial and important, the near and the distant, with the same fecklessly impartial eye. And the Pre-Raphaelite is the worse, because he is not forced into a fatal course by scientific necessity. He is not racked upon a machine that makes two thousand

revolutions in a minute, though he deserves to be. No; he pursues his niggled path in the full knowledge of his enormity, and with at least a chance, if ever he opened his eye, of discovering the straight road. The eye of the true impressionist, on the other hand, is the Cinematograph's antithesis. It never permits itself to see everything or to be perplexed by a minute survey of the irrelevant. It picks and chooses from nature as it pleaseth; it is shortsighted, when myopia proves its advantage; it can catch the distant lines, when a reasoned composition demands so far a research. It is artistic, because it is never mechanical, because it expresses a personal bias both in its choice and in its rejection. It looks beyond the foreground and to the larger, more spacious lines of landscape. Nature is its material, whereas Fred Walker¹ and his followers might have been inspired by a series of photographic plates.

Literature, too, has ever hankered unconsciously after the Cinematograph. Is not Zola the M Lumière of his art? And might not a sight of the Cinematograph have saved the realist from a wilderness of lost endeavour? As the toy registers every movement without any expressed relation to its fellow, so the old and fearless realist believed in the equal value of all facts. He collected information in the spirit of the swiftly moving camera, or of the statistician. Nothing came amiss to him, because he considered nothing of supreme importance. He emptied his notebooks upon foolscap and believed himself an artist. His work was so faithful in detail that in the bulk it conveyed no meaning whatever. The characters and incidents were as grey and silent as the active shadows of the Cinematograph. M Zola and M Huysmans (in his earlier incarnation) posed as the Columbuses of a new art, and all the while they were merely playing the despised part of the newspaper reporter. They fared forth, notebook in hand, and described the most casual accidents as though they were the essentials of a rapid life. They made an heroic effort to strip the brain of its power of argument and generalisation. They were as keenly convinced that all phenomena are of equal value as is the impersonal lens, which today is the academician's best friend. But they forget that the human brain cannot expose itself any more easily than the human eye to an endless series of impartial impressions. For the human brain is not mechanical: it cannot avoid the tasks of selection and revision, and when it measures itself against a photographic apparatus it fails perforce.

It is the favourite creed of the realists that truth is valuable for its own sake, that the description of a tiresome hat or an infamous pair of trousers has a merit of its own closely allied to accuracy. But life in itself is seldom interesting—so much has been revealed by photography; life, until it be crystallised into an arbitrary mould, is as flat and fatuous as the passing bus. The realist, however, has formulated his ambition: the master of the future, says he, will produce the very gait and accent of the back-parlour. This

ambition may already be satisfied by the Cinematograph, with the phonograph to aid, and while the sorriest pedant cannot call the result supremely amusing, so the most sanguine of photographers cannot pronounce it artistic. At last we have been permitted to see the wild hope of the realists accomplished. We may look upon life moving without purpose, without beauty, with no better impulse than a foolish curiosity; and though the spectacle frightens rather than attracts, we owe it a debt of gratitude, because it proves the complete despair of modern realism.

As the realistic painter, with his patient, unspeculative eye bent upon a restless foreground, produces an ugly, tangled version of nature, so the disciple of Zola perplexes his indomitable industry by the compilation of contradictory facts. Not even M Zola himself, for all his acute intelligence, discovered that *Lourdes*, for instance, was a mere flat record.² By the force of a painful habit, he differentiated his characters; he did not choose a single hero to be the mule (as it were), who should sustain all the pains and all the sins of the world. No, he bravely labelled his abstractions with names and qualities, but he played the trick with so little conviction, that a plain column and a half of bare fact would have conveyed as much information and more amusement. Now, M Zola has at least relieved the gloom of ill digested facts by adroitly thrown *pétards*. When you find his greyness at its greyest, he will flick in a superfluous splash of scarlet, to arouse you from your excusable lethargy. But in America, where even the novel may be 'machine-made', they know far better than to throw *pétards*. Their whole theory of art is summed up in the Cinematograph, so long as that instrument does its work in such an unexciting atmosphere as the backyard of a Boston villa. Life in the States, they murmur, is not romantic. Therefore the novel has no right to be romantic. Because Boston is hopelessly dull, therefore Balzac is an impostor. For them, the instantaneous photograph, and a shorthand clerk. And, maybe, when the historian of the future has exhausted the advertisement columns of the pompous journals, he may turn (for statistics) to the American novel, first cousin, by a hazard, to the Cinematograph.

The dominant lesson of M Lumière's invention is this: the one real thing in life, art, or literature, is unreality. It is only by the freest translation of facts into another medium that you catch that fleeting impression of reality, which a paltry assemblage of the facts themselves can never impart. The master quality of the world is human invention, whose liberal exercise demonstrates the fatuity of a near approach to 'life'. The man who invents, may invent harmoniously; he may choose his own key, and bend his own creations to his imperious will. And if he be an artist, he will complete his work without hesitancy or contradiction. But he who insists upon a minute and conscientious vision, is forthwith hampered by his own material, and is almost

forced to see discordantly. Hence it is that M Zola is interesting only in isolated pages. His imagination is so hopelessly crippled by sight, that he cannot sustain his eloquence beyond the limit of a single impression. Suppose he does astonish you by a flash of entertainment, he relapses instantly into dullness, since for him, as for the Cinematograph, things are interesting, not because they are beautiful or happily combined, but because they exist, or because they recall, after their clumsy fashion, a familiar experience.

Has, then, the Cinematograph a career? Artistically, no; statistically, a thousand times, yes. Its results will be beautiful only by accident, until the casual, unconscious life of the street learns to compose itself into rhythmical pictures. And this lesson will never be learned outside the serene and perfect air of heaven. But if only the invention be widely and properly applied, then history may be written, as it is acted. With the aid of these modern miracles, we may bottle (so to say) the world's acutest situations. They will be poured out to the students of the future without colour and without accent, and though their very impartiality may mislead, at least they will provide the facts for a liberal judgment. At least they will give what an ingenious critic of the drama once described as 'slabs of life'. For the Cinematograph the phrase is well chosen; but for Ibsen, who prompted its invention, no phrase were more ridiculous. For whatever your opinion of *Hedda Gabler*, at least you must absolve its author from a too eager rivalry with M Lumière's hastily-revolving toy.

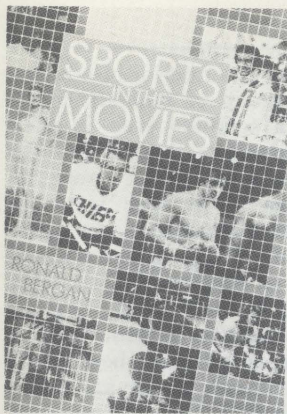
And now, that Science may ever keep abreast of literature, comes M Röntgen's invention³ to play the part of the psychologist. As M Bourget (shall we say?) uncovers the secret motives and inclinations of his characters, when all you ask of him is a single action, so M Röntgen bids photography pierce the husk of flesh and blood and reveal to the world the skeletons of living men. In Science the penetration may be invaluable; in literature it destroys the impression, and substitutes pedantry for intelligence. M Röntgen, however, would commit no worse an outrage than the cure of the sick and the advancement of knowledge. Wherefore he is absolved from the mere suspicion of an onslaught upon art. But it is not without its comedy, that photography's last inventions are twin echoes of modern literature. The Cinematograph is but realism reduced to other terms, less fallible and more amusing; while M Röntgen's rays suggest that, though a too intimate disclosure may be fatal to romance, the doctor and the curiosity-monger may find it profitable to pierce through our 'too, too solid flesh' and count the rattling bones within. ■

¹Frederick Walker (1840–1875), British genre painter and watercolourist.

²*Lourdes* (1894), part of Zola's trilogy *Les Trois Villes*.

³Wilhelm Conrad Röntgen (1845–1923) discovered X-rays in 1895.

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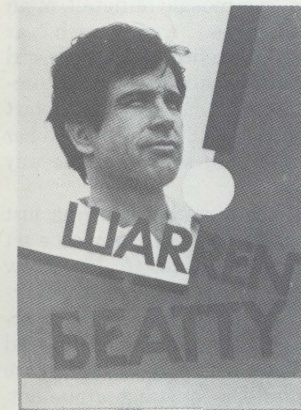
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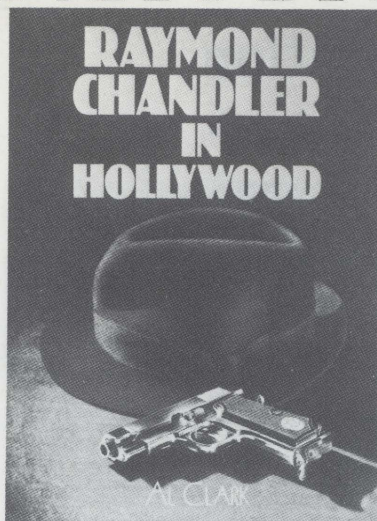
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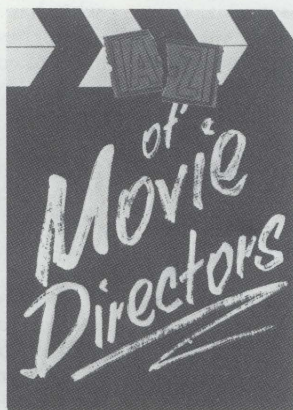


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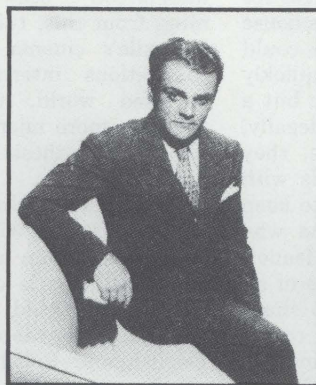
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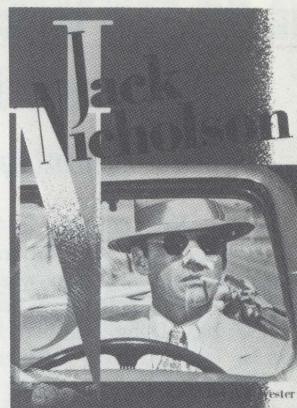
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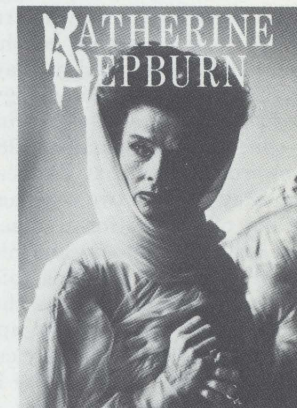
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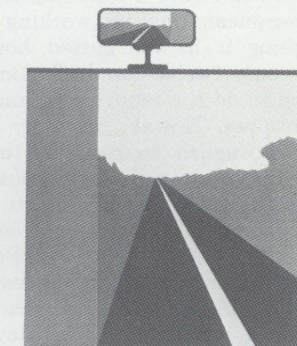
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FILM REVIEWS

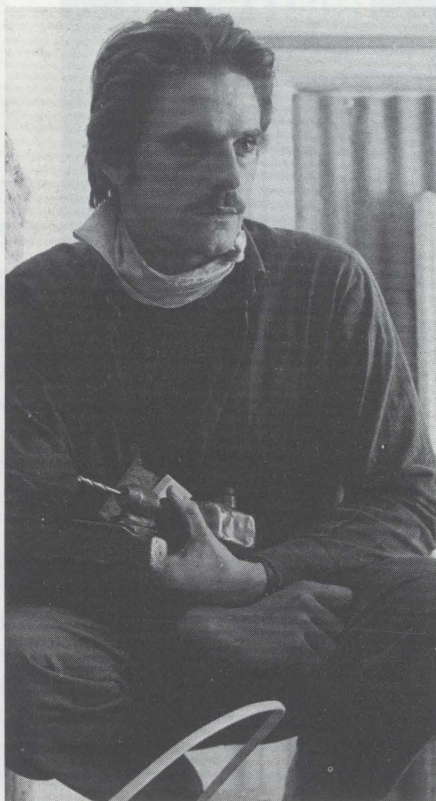
Lost in translation

Moonlighting/Richard Combs

Film-making has become a laborious business since the days when studios took the waiting, and time-wasting, out of finding projects, setting up deals, completing scripts. Long hiatuses litter the careers of even 'active' directors. Take Jerzy Skolimowski: six years between *King, Queen, Knave* and *The Shout*; four years between that and *Moonlighting* (with some revision of *Hands Up!* in between). But in Skolimowski's case the laboriousness is contradicted by the sense that, when the films do arrive, they are like lightning raids, coming out of nowhere (or strange, multi-national mixtures of somewhere) and moving with the stealth and wit of those who travel light (only *The Shout* seems lavishly mainstream, and quite nimbly plays footsy with that cinema's demonology genre). *Moonlighting* (Miracle) is a prime example—conceived in December 1981, shown and awarded a prize at Cannes the following May—but in two ways has written itself out of the art-for-art's sake world of the exile and into public history. So swift and efficient was this raid that it has become a milestone in the British film industry, and it deals specifically with last December's military crackdown in Poland. Imagine a novel by Nabokov, reflecting the Moscow show trials in *Lolita's* America.

This, and an outline of the plot, might suggest allegory. Nowak (Jeremy Irons) arrives in London with three fellow Poles, ostensibly to buy a second-hand car with their joint savings, but in fact to renovate the Kensington house of their 'boss'. What they will gain is a year's wages for a month's work, and he will get his house redecorated more cheaply than he could using British labour. Their lives quickly take on not only a claustrophobic but a subterranean quality: working illegally, roughing it in the gutted house, they have only twelve hundred pounds with which to do the renovations and to keep themselves. Nowak, the only one who speaks English so perforce the leader, soon imposes a penitential routine of all work and no play and resorts to shoplifting to feed them. When news comes of the military takeover in Poland, he keeps it from the others for fear of what it would do to morale—his own imagination has meanwhile been playing over what may be happening between his girl Anna and the boss. By the time the job is finished, on schedule, the situation has become Nowak vs the rest, as he withholds their bonuses to put a deposit on a sanding machine and on occasion locks them in the house.

But if artists in exile are unmindful of national ties, they tend to be scornful of political allegories (vide, again, Nabokov). And where allegory must work from the particular to the general, *Moonlighting* works more from the particular



Nowak (Jeremy Irons).

to the particular. It is a minefield, in fact, of particularities, of which the Polish situation is only one. Part of this is the hypersensitivity of the outsider to the strangeness all around him—details weigh heavily when they're only half understood at best. And part of it, stemming from this, the inevitable motor of an exile's cinema, is that it explores connections internally, it is a self-enclosed world, the microcosm just becomes more micro instead of expanding into a thesis about Poland and Solidarity.

Poland, to begin with, is a state of mind, sketched with a simplicity that shuns re-creation as much as flashback. The first shot is of a Lot airline girl, twisting a braid of hair while she announces the departure to London in English and Polish; the camera tracks along a row of faces, supposedly at a Tina Turner concert in Poland though aural re-creation is shunned as well, while Nowak recalls how Anna sat between himself and the boss. The latter is played by Skolimowski, in a touch not of self-consciousness as such (he is the boss who made this trip, this film, possible) but of further self-enclosure.

As for the particularities, one might divide them into two major sets: the building and the thieving. For a director probably known best for his surreal sense of humour, Skolimowski lets us know with classical precision how things happen, to wit, the deconstruction and

reconstruction of the interior of a house. His mournful group of builders consequently have a solidity—even in their lack of individuality—that allows the political implications, as it were, of Nowak's actions to be seen from the inside rather than imposed by metaphor from the outside. (Is it surrealist intensity, similarly, or simple dramatic sense to have Nowak constantly worrying if the man he sees opposite, trysting with a married woman, is in fact his boss, whom he believes has already had an affair with his own girlfriend?) The real and the surreal tug fascinatingly at each other in our sense of the group and the way the performances work: the joker in Skolimowski's pack is that a non-actor (Eugeniusz Haczkiwicz) is the only real Pole, and Jeremy Irons merges superbly with an assumed Polishness while our knowledge of his 'foreignness' to the others makes the drift of their relationship credible.

The system by which Nowak pilfers from a supermarket—buying one lot of groceries, leaving his gloves behind, returning to recover them and filling his bag with an identical, or identically priced, set of groceries, for which he already has a receipt—is as detailed as the building. According to Skolimowski, it was inspired by *Pickpocket*, and it is interesting how surreal austerity in this play of hands follows Bresson's spiritual version. One dips out of need and the other out of compulsion in the materialist pot, and both achieve their state of grace. Nowak's comes in *Aquascutum*, where for the first time in his war to live off the land (a point here about the material deprivations of Poland), he goes for the luxury goods, hesitates, then takes a scarf as his right, calmly bluffing the salesman (a point not about Poland but the exile who has finally found himself). Apart from these two sets of 'particulars', the film, of course, is a mosaic of detail, of an inimitably hilarious sort, such as Nowak's dotty courtship of the salesgirl in a Wrangler store, showing her a photograph of his Anna in a Wrangler T-shirt in the belief that it will be the way to her heart, where she only sees it as the way to another sale.

At the end, their money expiring just as they finish the house, the foursome set out on a six mile walk to Heathrow airport, pushing their baggage in supermarket trolleys, and Nowak finally manages to tell the others what has happened back home. They round on him, but we hear nothing of the ensuing argument, only the rattle of the trolleys running out of control. What they say, and what will happen when they return to Poland, is irrelevant. The film has closed its last trap, its characters have entered the last minefield. What should have had (owing to its production conditions) an off-the-cuff, improvisatory feel, and (owing to its topicality) the quality of instant journalism, instead is a satisfyingly complex, interrelated whole, rounded at both ends with a dream of home.

Moonlighting reflects inwards, its

themes wing back and forth like crazed messages inside a closed box. Mirrors served such a function in *King, Queen, Knave*, sounds in *The Shout*. Here, apart from all the comedy of foreignness—the English are wickedly caricatured; Nowak, as he admits, understands what they are saying but doesn't know what they mean—there is a problem of communication. Nowak stares at soundless pictures of tanks in Warsaw on TV sets in a store window, and uses their own second-hand, broken TV as a radio. Poland is the subject of *Moonlighting* rather as pre-revolutionary Russia is the subject of Nabokov (particularly in its most bizarre rearrangement in *Pale Fire*). Being so contained, the film might be opened out as the spectator wishes: as a reflection on recent events, as a metaphor for the pitfalls of leadership (Skolimowski's preferred interpretation), or as a plain piece of Beckett about four men in an absurdly tight situation. □

Black on black

Burning an Illusion

Nick Roddick

In all the major film-producing countries—assuming that Britain is one—films about the black experience are minority films. As such, they tend to come in three varieties. Blaxploitation films like *Superfly* and *Cleopatra Jones*, which celebrate a ghetto situation without really questioning it. The British market has never been able to support these. Liberal conscience pictures in the Stanley Kramer mould. We haven't bothered much with them either. And independent features made by and about black people. There, there are signs of life in Britain, of which *Burning an Illusion* is the most recent as well as potentially the most interesting and the most problematic. One of the ways in which it is problematic is that, because it looks like getting wider distribution than *Pressure*, *Blacks Britannica* or *Babylon*, it necessarily strays into the wider (liberal) arena.

Liberal films belong in the wider arena. They demand guilt—a comfortable, non-specific guilt which can be equally comfortably assuaged by allowing the (white) audience to identify with the (black) underdog, and take pleasure in him/her beating the system. It's called having your cake and eating it, and it makes for a great night out. Menelik Shabazz doesn't play that game, though he does flirt with it. *Burning an Illusion* (BFI) has most of the hallmarks of militant cinema. Del (Victor Romero) is jailed for slashing a policeman in circumstances which are, from his (and therefore our) point of view, highly ambiguous. At the very least, he is provoked. In prison, he embarks on a course of self-education, writing to his woman Pat (Cassie

McFarlane) that 'black people have got to fight back'. Pat becomes politically active and the film ends with her on a bus, presumably on the way to a picket or a demo, celebrating her new consciousness and her black sisterhood with a clenched fist on which the frame freezes.

On the other hand, the devices which Shabazz uses to bring his audience to this point are, by comparison with the militant films of the 60s and early 70s, fairly traditional: a progression towards increased consciousness through a series of individual circumstances whose wider repercussions are not initially stressed, accompanied by a first-person voice over from Pat to guide us through the transitions. Shabazz is not really concerned with questioning the nature of cinematic representation. What he is concerned with is reaching the people the film is about (who may be affected by the nature of cinematic representation but are not fundamentally concerned with it), and he has apparently been very successful with screenings followed by discussions among London's black community. The film makes certain concessions to other audiences, notably by softening the West Indian patois in the dialogue scenes and removing it entirely from the voice over. But it is not really for another audience. Which is what makes reviewing it in that context problematic. To welcome the film is not enough. To comment on its suitability for its intended audience is, for a white middle-class reviewer, presumptuous.

With the proviso, then, that my opinion is handicapped, if not actually invalid—the film is about a black, working-class woman and I am a white middle-class man; even the pretensions

of liberal empathy are limited—there are two things that are particularly impressive about *Burning an Illusion*. The first is that, like Horace Ové's *Pressure*, its militancy is gradually arrived at. Most of the film avoids the immediate impact drama of conflict with the systems of a white society, and concentrates instead on everyday problems which are primarily male/female and only secondarily black/white. Pat's aspirations are those of the world in which she has been brought up: an annual holiday; a new carpet for her neat, tower-block apartment; a colour TV. Del's are universally male. 'My dignity come first,' he tells Pat. 'Man must be free, you know ... Trouble with you, man, you're too possessive.' By which he means that Pat, having taken over the financial responsibility entirely when he is sacked, and having cooked his food for him, expects him not to go out every night with his friends, nor to assume she will bring them beer when they take over the apartment to play cards.

In the end, she throws him out. This in itself is a major breakthrough, not just for her but for the film. Instead of showing the problems of Britain's black communities to be the result of directly negative intervention by white authorities (employers, teachers, police), *Burning an Illusion* treats a black relationship equally threatened by unconsciously adopted external attitudes (on Pat's part) and traditional male West Indian attitudes (on Del's). In other words, it focuses on ordinary life in the black community, rather than making that community an inevitable focus for crisis and drama.

But the last part of the film rather abandons this tack for the easier task of consciousness-raising through conflict (however inevitable that conflict may be). Pat's assertion of her rights as a woman is partly channelled if not actually subverted into her being 'part of the struggle for equal rights and liberation'. It is Del's demand for books to read in jail that occasions this change. 'What was funny,' she says, 'was that his interest in books was rubbing off on me.' Why funny? It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that, having taken the lead in the struggle for equal sexual rights—not just in her own case, but in advising her friend Sonia not to allow herself to be pushed around by her man—she takes second place once again in the broader political struggle. That the lessons learned in the first part of the film are carried over into the second part is assumed rather than demonstrated. Is Pat black first and a woman second, or a woman first and black second? And do I have the right to ask that question, being neither? What is more, does it matter that I think the film is fine but flawed? The important thing is that it should work. And that it seems certain to do. It reflects an experience, burns an illusion and portrays a consciousness. That, in the context of its production and its potential distribution, is more than enough. □



Pat (Cassie McFarlane).

FILM REVIEWS



'A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy': 'deep in rural Never Never Land'.

'Well moused, Lion'

A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy/John Pym

There is a faintly disquieting ring to the title of Woody Allen's new movie. Has the *Dream* become that blunt twentieth century instrument a mere Sex Comedy? And what about the hints of *Smiles of a Summer Night*? Though not so much in the title as in those eagerly awaited, jealously guarded snippets of 'news' which precede the release of one of the Maestro's pictures. Has not Bergman loomed too long, a distanced, cultured spectre, frightening the luckless Allen into paroxysms of inadequacy? Are we in for strained pastiche? Worse, a mixture? Will Allen play Bottom? Or will he, with self-conscious deference, cast himself as Philostrate, the dull master of revels? The lights dim, Mendelssohn's Incidental Music to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* rises over the plain credits—the cast in alphabetical order: would this be so if Woody was still Allen Konigsberg? Relax. 'All for your delight, we are not here.'

A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy (Columbia-EMI-Warner) turns out to be its own. The setting is East Coast America, a country house set deep in rural Never Never Land, the turn of the century. The characters are dressed in linen suits, straw hats, long dresses, Impressionist swimming togs. There are to be sure echoes of Bergman's plot: an inexperienced wife is worried by the arrival of a guest, a woman for whom years ago, it seems, her husband harboured a tenderness; *Midsummer Night* affects everyone strangely (and the other guests correspond vaguely to those at Eva Dahlbeck's country mansion—though who can now remember the plot exactly?); partners change and everything works out. As for Shakespeare, the husband's love is named Ariel Weymouth, and there is a weird 'spirit box', a prop left over from *Sleeper*, which at the close sends out into the woods latter-

day Peaseblossoms and Mustardseeds. Allen himself takes the least gregarious part, the apparently non-Jewish husband, an inventor with an unspecified job on Wall Street.

This comedy is not side-splitting: there is very little Manhattan babble, very few sharp displays of cleverness. The tone, in keeping with the idyllic setting (and the setting is for once, it can be asserted, genuinely, dreamily idyllic), is whimsical in a way that Allen, who has never hesitated to try out a new form, has never previously been. In earlier days, the inventor, Andrew Hobbs, would have had much to do with his inventions. Now they are simply there, accepted by all, hazardingly uncertain—his wings will not lift him off the ground, his foot-powered helicopter dunks him and Ariel in a lake—but not done to death. In fact, they are deployed with great skill. The helicopter is reserved for one hilarious, important scene: instead of going to her door to beg Ariel to meet his friend Maxwell (Tony Roberts, ever the more experienced lover), Andrew launches the helicopter and hovers, desperately, outside her window pleading someone else's case.

Now about these women. Mia Farrow, the frizzy Ariel; Mary Steenburgen, Adrian, Andrew's anxious spouse; Julie Hagerty, Dulcy, Maxwell's date, a nurse who understands how the body works, can advise Adrian on womanly matters. No Helenas or Hermias; Bergman would not have countenanced them. They are members of that half-delightful, half-infuriating tribe of Allen women, creatures not entirely of this world, ineffably dreamy but capable of plain horse sense when the occasion demands. Dulcy, the most abstracted, soon has Adrian determinedly wrestling Andrew—honest Andrew who resists Ariel for all he is

worth, for she is about to be married to Professor José Ferrer (and he is a genuinely mock-Swedish concoction)—on to table tops in hopes of overcoming her six-month disinclination to make... But no one, any longer, is afraid to ask about sex. Allen, so long the desperate lover, has relaxed to such a point that he can now make jokes about his character's fidelity.

Allen, like Theseus before the mechanicals' performance, is now increasingly disposed to look upon his characters with genuine kindness. They are all trying, by their own lights, to behave with propriety: assignments are discreet; the Professor, a pompous windbag with some deliciously exact lines (another Allen first), propositions the nurse, all eagerness, genuine eagerness, with a sudden display of awkwardness—it is his last chance for infidelity, tomorrow he will be married, and he holds the marriage vows inviolate. Even Maxwell for all his snowballing desperation to declare his love for Ariel is not above flustered confusion when, lurking by a brook, waiting for the ill-fated helicopter, he spies the equally embarrassed Professor.

A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy is very likely to infuriate. Cries of 'Self-indulgence!' will be heard. It is not to be sure *Bananas* or *Take the Money and Run*. More to the point it is not *Annie Hall* or *Manhattan*. The author is not on home base. Unlike Mel Brooks, who trained in the same school of stand-up tomfoolery, he is not wholly comfortable with period, in those long ago days before every decent middle-class home had an attendant psychiatrist. And yet, and yet. For the true believer, and name me among them, what marks this movie, makes the experience of watching it (even in the company of one's long-faced colleagues) a sheerly enjoyable 87 minutes—and economy is another virtue—is that it is one in a series. The work links; the variations have a history. Tony Roberts is, in his own way, a James Finlayson. One needs to know how the women will be translated: from Louise Lasser to Mia Farrow, and not one of them has missed the mark. Even in *Interiors* there was Maureen Stapleton.

Whimsy is the trickiest of comic forms. Pratfalls are one thing. But to have a character vainly attempt to climb a trellis, fall off and raise a chuckle, without resorting to the devices of slapstick is quite another. Allen achieves it: moments are artfully thrown away, inconsequentiality prevails. He has been a magpie, seizing every potential comic moment. But here, one feels, a certain restraint: the laughs are not piled on, the effects, like Andrew's sudden obsequious exposition at one of the Professor's insufferable observations, are one-off, unexpected. Similarly, the sudden verbal shafts, an agitated reference to the sexual joys of 'Mexican cartwheels', hit their mark more resoundingly through being loosed more circumspectly. Woody Allen, in short, reveals a surprisingly delicate hand. 'Well moused, Lion.' □



Mr Neville (Anthony Higgins), right, and his servant (Alastair Cummings).

Marienbad revisited

The Draughtsman's Contract/Jill Forbes

Who killed Cock Robin? When Mr Herbert of Compton Anstey suffers a fatal misadventure on returning from a visit to Southampton, who could have engineered his death? Was it his neglected wife, born and brought up at Anstey and, in a way, its rightful owner? Or his unhappily married daughter Mrs Talmann, perhaps with her mother's connivance? Or his son-in-law the pompous and opinionated Mr Talmann, impatient to introduce some German efficiency into the running of an estate he already considered his own? Could it have been Mr Noyes, to whom Mrs Herbert had once been promised and who remained as estate manager after her marriage to Mr Herbert? Or was it, in fact, the *genius loci* whose physical embodiment is glimpsed from time to time cavorting on the balustrades, posing as a statue of Hermes or of Bacchus. And why? To the question *cui bono?* any number of answers might be given. No one is innocent, least of all Mr Neville who, at the outset, was a mere recipient of patronage with no part in this patrician intrigue.

The location of Peter Greenaway's murder story is not the Edwardian lawns of the classics of the genre but an English country garden in the 1690s. The date is charged with significance. William of Orange has just secured national unity and Protestant supremacy with his victory at the Boyne and the Glencoe massacre. After the political revolutions, the foreign expeditions and the French and Dutch expansionism of the seventeenth century, the dawning age will be one of peace at home and imperial consolidation. The gentry will embark on a regime of clearances and enclosures, agricultural innovation and 'improvement'. Englishmen will cultivate their gardens, and their interest in landscape will not be innocent of politics: a leading contempor-

ary authority on the subject will not hesitate to assert that the natural aspect, the irregularities and the studied profusion of the eighteenth century English garden signify Liberty in contrast to the 'oppression' of formal French designs.

Mr Neville is a draughtsman of rising reputation. He is employed by Mrs Herbert to furnish, in so many days, twelve drawings of the house and gardens at Compton Anstey in all their aspects. Mr Herbert, true to the national inclination, loves his house, his garden, his horse and his wife in that order, and by offering him a gift which celebrates his first loves Mrs Herbert hopes, or so she says, to steer some of his affection towards herself. Mr Neville will receive, in payment, eight pounds a drawing, board and lodging, and the freedom of Mrs Herbert's person. After six drawings have been completed, the contract is redrafted to include Mrs Talmann's favours also. Mr Neville believes in verisimilitude. He is but a draughtsman, though one who is conscious of his merits. His attitude to nature is, in the words of one of the house guests, entirely material. Truth is productive of beauty, and so he squares his drawing-paper so as to achieve a scale reproduction of the original. He has no place for fantasy or the imagination.

But the times being what they are, the aesthetic is changing and fantasy begins to intrude. The landscape begins, in Hogarth's words, to 'lead the eye a wanton kind of chase'. Untoward objects, a shirt, a pair of boots, a ladder and even a dog, begin to make their appearance where they are least expected and against Mr Neville's express instructions that nothing is to be altered. But since they are there, Mr Neville records them all with stunning literal-mindedness. Perhaps someone placed them there so that he should record them? For had not Mr

Talmann opined that English art was a contradictory term? And who, therefore, could suspect Neville of artifice?

But the question is what narrative might be attached to these unrelated elements and how Mr Neville's testimony is to reveal its allegorical implications. Surprise was about to become a feature of landscape design and so Compton Anstey, like Pope's Windsor Forest or Balzac's La Ville-aux-Fayes, turns out to be full of concealed marauders. Mr Herbert's body is found as Mr Neville departs for another commission, and the battle for the inheritance is joined. Each character attempts to exploit his own version of events. Mr Noyes claims that the drawings incriminate Mrs Herbert and tries blackmail. Mr Talmann tells his wife that her adultery is manifest thanks to Neville and buys the drawings at an inflated price. Mrs Herbert and Mrs Talmann affirm that the drawings are irrelevant and that the key to the contract was their desperate need for an heir. Mr Neville returns to pay a courtesy call of amorous design on Mrs Herbert. He offers to complete a thirteenth drawing at his own expense. Unluckily for him. Noyes, Talmann and a posse of house guests club him to death as he completes his sketch by torchlight. His drawings are burnt.

The Draughtsman's Contract (BFI) is an extraordinary achievement. It is a costume drama which is so beautifully written and acted that it contains no trace of embarrassment; a highly intellectual film which is so briskly paced that it totally avoids pomposity. It would probably be impossible to recognise, let alone list, all Greenaway's sources, but one at least must be mentioned since it is accepted by the film-maker himself. Something is clearly owed to *Last Year in Marienbad*: the slightly stilted visual repertoire, and especially the way shots are framed and figures are placed in the landscape, and also the nature, if not the detail, of the intellectual quest concerned (Greenaway considers representation where Resnais considers memory, and the contrast is perhaps a pointer to the subject of the film).

One might also suspect Greenaway of being a reader of the *nouveau roman* for other reasons as well, for if the self-reflexiveness of *Marienbad* is the work of Robbe-Grillet, it is in Michel Butor's *L'Emploi du temps* where the notion that the evidence of a murder might be inscribed in a work of art (and an English one at that) is most elegantly developed. But the reference to *Marienbad* is chiefly important because it underlines Greenaway's concern—no doubt a personal one—to make an English film, an anti-*Marienbad* perhaps. The way he explores the relation between fact and fiction, 'truth' and 'beauty' is ingeniously carried out in the context of the English tradition, not least of film-making, and this is why the landscape is so important, for it is in landscape design that, if Pevsner is to be believed, the true Englishness of English art is revealed. □

FILM REVIEWS

Breathless

Diva

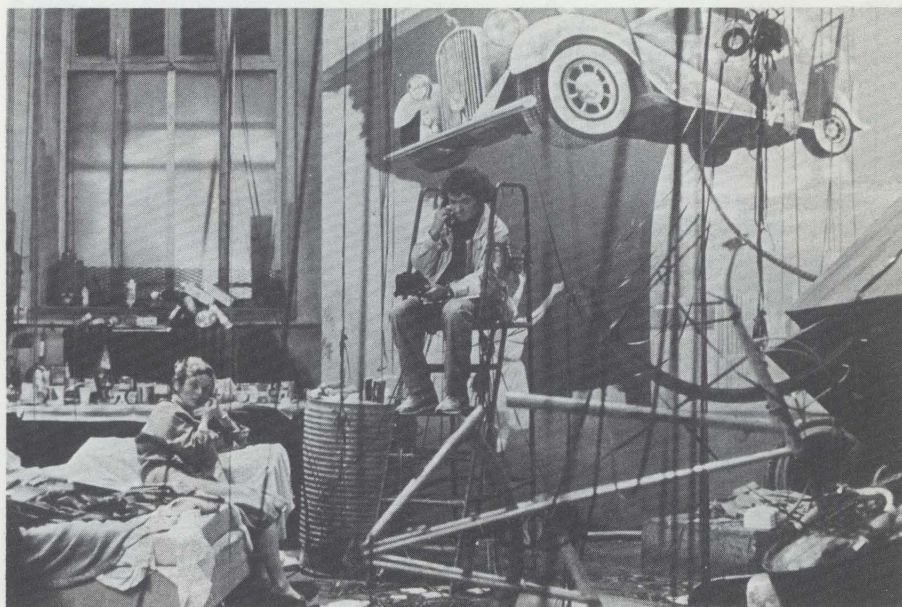
Martyn Auty

Diva (Palace Pictures) is the first feature by Jean-Jacques Beineix, a former assistant to a number of mainstream French directors—Berri, Clément, Zidi, the Trintignants. One notes first its contemporaneity—a hyper-realist, post-punk visual style—overlooking, perhaps, the traditions of humanism and genre cinema, the *policier*, in which the film is rooted. For all its violence and ambivalence, *Diva* is mobilised in the defence of art and 'free expression'. Evil schemers are outwitted by idle dreamers, and the revered opera singer, the Diva of the title, forgives her adoring fan, Jules, for 'violating' her art by tape recording one of her concerts, something she has never permitted in her professional career. Happy endings are assured as the film gradually supplants the realist logic of the genre with fantasy and wish fulfilment; yet innocence, as symbolised by a seabird endangered by a huge wave in the jigsaw one of the characters is working on, is constantly, perhaps perpetually, under threat.

The particular frisson of *Diva* is to witness contemporary stylishness—the elegance of the Diva in her hotel room, the chic of the supercool hero Gorodish—triumphant over ugliness (the punkish gangsters), corruption (the police chief) or inscrutability (the grasping, blackmailing Oriental businessmen). A traditional morality then, in ultramodern garb. But the modernity of Beineix's style should not be undervalued. Pop Art decors, offbeat locations, selective colours and idiosyncratic compositions are assertively used to create a fantasy world which is only a sidestep from crime-movie realism, itself a stylisation from the pulp thriller.

The plot, which turns and U-turns on a confusion over two, and subsequently three, tape recordings the various villains would kill for, is a cunning piece of cinematic adaptation, from a novel by 'Delacorta', that calls attention to the importance of sound. In the opening sequence we hear a full-bodied aria over the credits which is abruptly cut short when the young mailman Jules switches off the cassette machine on his moped. Subsequently, the interaction of classical music with traditional French music or contemporary rock creates further tensions. Beineix also uses silences judiciously interposed between scenes of dialogue and tyre-squealing action.

The texture of his images, however, is even richer than that of the soundtrack, for here Beineix has boldly attempted to integrate two environments—a film familiar Paris, the Place de la Concorde, the Tuilleries, and a newer, more vulgar, Paris of parking lots, wrecked warehouses and pinball arcades. Each milieu is its own significant setting, but the



'Diva': The law, Anny Romand and Patrick Floersheim.

action drives Jules, the 'innocent' object of the malefactors' pursuit, to cross the boundaries, to move from his own loft, decorated with hyper-realist paintings and furnished with little more than a Nagra sound system, to the suite of the Diva, a cool neo-classical interior redolent of the grand operatic tradition, and beyond into the subways and night-time haunts. The interaction of backgrounds is just as unnerving as the tensions between the opposing characters.

Indeed there is little depth in *Diva's* characterisation: the boy Jules (Frédéric Andrei) is disarmingly obsessed with the Diva (Wilhelmenia Wiggins Fernandez); she, in return, shows her 'generosity' by befriending him, though not consummating their relationship sexually. The two pairs of villains are not without style and humour, particularly the balding, ice-pick-wielding punk who detests everything; and the oddball couple, Alba, a Vietnamese girl, and Gorodish, the contemplative 'hero' with the jigsaw who chainsmokes Gitanes and dresses totally in blue, relate more to objects than to feelings but are no less 'human' for all that.

That the film should be so engaging and amusing is attributable rather to the increasingly improbable action, which includes Gorodish luring the police chief to a rendezvous and switching the vital tape recordings, then replacing his treasured white Citroen with an identical model after the first car has been blown sky high in an explosion that conveniently wipes out one pair of villains. Beineix describes these interventions as those of a character manipulating the plot from within; they are reminiscent of Superman or Fantomas in their tongue-in-cheek snubs to dramatic plausibility. In this sense the dramatic structure is strikingly close to the operatic form and it is entirely appropriate that the film should end in an opera-house with the Diva singing an aria from *La Wally*.

Beineix acknowledges opera as a key

influence on his work, preferring its heightened demonstrative action and stylised settings to conventional film realism. His second feature, an adaptation of David Goodis' thriller *The Moon in the Gutter*, with Nastassia Kinski and Gérard Depardieu, will, he believes, be even more operatic. In his use of classical music in modernist settings Beineix has been compared to the young Godard. The most apposite cross-reference would be to *A Bout de Souffle*. Both films display their affection for Hollywood cinema and Americana through a gangster movie plot and the relationship between a Frenchman and an American woman, and both represent a distinctive departure from the ossifying conventions of the national cinema from which they spring. Such a comparison marks *Diva* as an auspicious debut from a refreshingly original talent. □

Underworld N.I.

Angel

Tim Pulleine

The introductory sequence of *Angel* (Channel 4) pictures a milieu hardly witnessed on our screens: the everyday reality of Ulster behind the media statistics of death and destruction which dominate 'mainland' apprehension of the Province. We watch a Saturday evening at a suburban dance hall, principally through the eyes of the visiting show band and its handsome, enigmatic saxophonist, Danny (Stephen Rea), the 'Stan Getz of South Armagh', as the band's manager introduces him. The film's ear for the ritual banter of small-time show business and its matchingly accurate eye for the demeanour of the assorted revelers bring to mind the British realist school of films like *Saturday Night* and *Sunday Morning*, while the fortuitous



'Angel': Danny (Stephen Rea).

association of the dance hall's name, Dreamland, perhaps evokes a memory of the Free Cinema documentaries which preceded them.

However, documentary realism is not, it rapidly becomes clear, the direction in which *Angel*, made in the Irish Republic by a first-time writer-director, the novelist Neil Jordan, is headed. The opening has already hinted at something more allusive via the wan figure of the mute girl, subject possibly of the title, whom Danny has sought to befriend. And when he keeps a chaste assignation with her at the evening's end, the tone switches abruptly to violent melodrama: Danny watches appalled as the band manager is surrounded by a trio of masked men and cold-bloodedly shot dead; he then fails to stop the girl from running out of hiding and being shot as a witness. Concussed by the ensuing bombing of the building, Danny comes to in hospital obsessed by tracking down the perpetrators of the outrage, and *Angel* becomes a species of underworld revenger's tragedy. John Boorman, on whose Irish-made Arthurian fantasy *Excalibur* Neil Jordan was

credited as 'creative consultant', is here executive producer; and the Boorman connection reminds one of *Point Blank* (different though the setting is), with its deflection of thriller material towards the figurative and abstract.

The groundwork of the thriller plot is cannily anchored in local observations. One retains the image of Danny's mother's claustrophobic tenement flat, and of the narrow cobbled streets with their rubbish-strewn vacant lots. There is, too, a laconic edge of revelation in the dialogue: when Annie (Veronica Quilligan), the band's singer and Danny's lover to be, counters his sententious quotation from a Shakespeare sonnet, he unerringly identifies her as a 'convent girl'.

The action is at times both audacious and forceful. There is, notably, a feral wildness (which one might perhaps call distinctively Gaelic) about the episode in which one of the marked men, cornered in his car, yells obscene taunts at Danny to pull the trigger, matched by the imagery, after the deed is done, of the brightly coloured vehicle careering out of control through the moorland terrain. In

the interstices of the film, too, Jordan and his cinematographer, Chris Menges, have created some memorably bizarre tableaux. These may be breezily humorous, as in the seaside publicity session, with the musicians posing against the wind in flapping purple zoot-suits; or sombrely unsettling, as in the mental hospital visit, with the patients shuffling in a circle around Annie as she sings the blues 'Strange Fruit', a song which evocatively interacts with the traditional Irish lament of 'Danny Boy' as heard earlier.

Jordan has also succeeded in drawing some fluent playing from his cast: one notes especially a touchingly exact performance by Lise-Ann McLaughlin as the ill-used wife of one of the thugs. Oddly, however, particularly in the light of his background as a novelist, he emerges on present form more confident as a director than as a screenwriter. The drawback to *Angel* is its uncertainty about how far, and in quite what spirit, to observe the protocols of the genre it has appropriated, and about how to align them with its excursions into bravura.

The plot need not, of course, be the important thing, but when there is as much of it as there is here—Danny's vendetta proves to be sanctioned by a lugubrious detective who is using him as a decoy to flush out a protection ring—we seem entitled to expect some degree of narrative explication. As things are, not only does Danny's capacity, either psychological or practical, to turn himself into Lee Marvin go unexplained, but the processes by which he tracks down his shadowy opponents seem just as unacceptably easy. Nor, despite the overt coincidences and periodic reliance on B-picture shorthand (as when Danny is able to hide himself behind a door in the room where one victim is discovered by his confederates), is there any consistent sense of a Godardian rejection of playing the generic game according to the illusionist rules. But if *Angel* tends to run out of steam as a thriller, it remains around the edges of the plot a directorial debut of personality and promise. □

The Seventh Art

PARENTS. The News is Edited to omit Atomic and other Horrors during the Disney Season.—Notice outside Cameo Cinema, Charing Cross Road, 1953

World's first 3-D casualty has had to have first aid treatment in hospital. This is what he told the doctors: 'I was standing in the street looking up when I noticed something falling; I watched it until it hit me smack in the eye. It proved to be a big potato. I blame the accident on 3-D movies. Having so many things thrown at me from the screen must have given me a false sense of security.'—'Daily Sketch', 1954

... It was reported that Mr Deeds Goes to Town had opened in Moscow, retitled In the Grip of the Dollar.—Motion Picture Herald, 1951

'The Robe' in CinemaScope relates the greatest story of love and faith ever told ... it stuns with its glory as it embraces the audience without the use of spectacles.—20th Century-Fox's advance publicity announcement, 1954

'Let's knock the sensitive, unstable aspect out of the motion picture business and put some solid momentum in it,' urged Universal chief Herc McIntyre ... The people were now highly discriminating in their selection of screen entertainment. Distributors and exhibitors must join forces in fighting this trend.—Report in the Australian Film Weekly, 1953

'Should leave any audience with a warm glow of satisfaction at the fade-out.'—Advertisement caption: 'What Every Woman Wants', 1954

Variety is the spice of [Geoffrey] Keen's screen life. He hardly ever plays the same part twice.—Film News from the J. Arthur Rank Organisation, 1955

A man has had to stop going to the cinema because the slight flickering of the film gives him an irresistible impulse to strangle the person in front of him. Several times while sitting in cinemas he has suddenly found himself with his hands round his neighbour's throat.—'Daily Express', 1953

It should be comparatively easy to rig up a guillotine in your lobby ...—Campaign Sheet for Monte Cristo—Masked Avenger, 1953

—From the 'Seventh Art' column featured in SIGHT AND SOUND during the early 50s.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Ourselves

**SIGHT AND SOUND:
A FIFTIETH
ANNIVERSARY
SELECTION**

edited by David Wilson
Faber and Faber/BFI/£12.50

There is no virtue in longevity: merit depends upon a well-spent life, and *SIGHT AND SOUND*'s celebratory anthology offers a packaged opportunity for appraisal of its fifty-year run. Its origins were in education, but even so it must be seen not as a child of the establishment, but as a rogue that got away—a year before the Film Institute itself—its progenitors a small pressure group. The teaching profession, ruled by the word, had a traditional mistrust of the visual, so compounded when pictures began to move as to become almost pathogenic. A leader in *The Schoolmaster* labelled cinema 'The Penny Debauch' and the headmaster of a famous school declared that it would lead to race suicide by sapping the brain energy of the young: 'Never has human ingenuity invented a device more efficacious for that sinister end than the moving picture,' he told an educational conference.

The tactic of the subversives was infiltration, aided by an articulate lobby of documentary film-makers, together with projector salesmen looking for a new mass market. *SIGHT AND SOUND*, once ensconced in the BFI, began an infiltration of its own, devoting an increasing measure of space to fictional films, or those of them with good intentions, or some claim to art, alongside films on elementary science and geography. This formative period, and its particular debt to the documentarists, notably Grierson, whose influence on British cinema is even today as inescapable as that of Reith on broadcasting, is admirably summarised in David Wilson's Introduction.

Skipping through the early volumes, where David Wilson has so fruitfully laboured, I find little to fault in his choices, though the decision having been taken, rightly, to print selected articles in full, there is much whose omission I regret; but then so does he. Certain pieces spring from the page, self-chosen. Eisenstein, despite a literary style on the montage principle (a mistaken conceit which broke out like a rash in the pages of *Close-Up* in the late 20s), has such passionate and perceptive things to say about the genius of Chaplin as to be ineluctable. D. W. Griffith, in a letter to the Editor, denies any racism in *The Birth of a Nation*:

how could it be, when he was 'part-raised by a lovable old Negress in old Kentucky'? Alistair Cooke, already mediating between the continents, explains the Marx Brothers to us. Hitch, in his best *faux-naïf* manner, admits to cheating a little in presenting the real, 'because of certain risks in humdrum truth', in nice contrast with Zavattini's hymn to the banal, fifteen years and fifty pages on. Ken Tynan writes irresistibly on W. C. Fields, with anecdotes new to us at the time (Fields telling his producers 'We must try to instruct and uplift as well as entertain'): not to be missed—though the later Garbo piece, beginning, I remember, 'What, when drunk, one sees in other women, one sees in Garbo sober', must have been a close contender for the Tynan spot. I demur only on the inclusion of Rudolf Arnheim on film and reality; his ponderous analyses, like some more recent theorising, so often turn out to be cumbersome elaborations of the obvious, a blunderbuss shooting peas.

The book, however, is more than a collation of goodies, and theory has its place, as in the history of the magazine itself, whose critical stance, consistently held in the face of constant stone-throwing and some major assaults, has I believe been a prime factor in its unparalleled survival. To understand this position, the reader should first turn to Gavin Lambert's *Who Wants True?*, where, in the delicate probing manner which marked all his thinking and all his writing, he formulates his credo, a plea, at once subtle and passionate, not for this or that 'cinema', an abstraction he deprecated, but for individual films by those artists, like Dovzhenko, Renoir, De Sica, Ford, Chaplin, 'who wanted true and wanted moving'. His meaning cannot be neatly contained in any single word, but the now sadly contentious 'humanist' probably still serves best.

Lambert would have been the last to reduce the critical debate to a mere form-content confrontation, but it was so reduced, then further pared to the simplism of 'commitment' (I prefer the Latin 'propaganda', Grierson once said). The issue was brought to a head when John Russell Taylor, in a letter now reprinted, attacked the committed for substituting moral judgments, justified by nothing but their own predilections, for criticism. Lindsay Anderson replied in an invited article with a wide-ranging but devastatingly precise dissection—structuralist before its time—of an effete liberal humanism fallen into scepticism and hiding its betrayal of responsibility behind a mask of detachment. His chosen title was *Stand Up! Stand Up!*. This article is not reprinted, to the editor's regret, for reasons I think can be deduced from his Introduction;

the omission is indeed regrettable.

Penelope Houston had succeeded Lambert on his departure for Hollywood. She had been with the magazine since its postwar regeneration, freed from educational ties, and moulded it gently but surely in her image, as a good editor always does, willy-nilly; its success is hers. In her own good time she took up the commitment argument in *The Critical Question*, her own statement of faith. The cool lambent style contrasts with Anderson's forceful manner, but her adherence to liberal humanism was unequivocal, and she quotes Trilling, no hero of the intellectual left, on 'the dark and bloody crossroads' where art and politics meet. They must and will meet, of course, but if they conflict it is usually the blood of the artist that is spilt. If I judge her, and SIGHT AND SOUND, alright she may indeed prefer the negative risks of scepticism to the more dangerous errors of enthusiasm. Objectivity, which implies tolerance, remains an ideal and though, like perfect virtue, it can never be attained, there is no harm, perhaps even a little good, in trying.

David Wilson argues that SIGHT AND SOUND has not only tried, but largely succeeded, and justifies its eclectic policies in the closing pages of his Introduction with persuasive examples. For my part, I need little persuading, having followed the magazine over the changing decades in its search for the 'true'—without which there can be no 'moving'—wherever it might be found. The book itself is hard evidence. Though a jubilee production, with appropriate good looks, it is much more, as I hope I have indicated, than a bedside book—though that too.

STANLEY REED

Academics

CINEMA, POLITICS AND SOCIETY IN AMERICA
editors, Philip Davies,
Brian Neve
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The most usual complaint raised against academics of film is that it is impossible to use their theories to explicate individual movies. The trees can't be seen for the wood. In his 1975 study of the Western, *Sixguns and Society* (discussed here by Christopher Frayling), Will Wright is quite casual about the situation. While categorising the plots of the most commercially successful Westerns in order to determine their relation to social change, he decides that 'the unique characteristics of each film' (actors, scripts, settings, etc), although they are 'necessary for the communication

of meaning ... are extraneous to the analysis of that meaning.'

Nothing quite so exclusive is proposed in this collection of twelve essays by assorted academics, perhaps because they are not so much offering new theories as trying out applications of the old. Hence there is actually a prodigious number of individual films brought into the discussion. But this creates a related, and even more curious, difficulty. Self-consciousness about the 'problematics' of all the approaches to film study tends to leave treatment of these titles high and dry, something in between list-making and a vague sociology that hardly meets the criteria of methodological rigour most of the essayists are careful to invoke at the outset. In this way, the trees wind up being removed from the wood.

At the beginning of his chapter on 'Keystone to Kojak: the Hollywood cop', Robert Reiner lays down these rules for himself: 'Attention must be paid to the immediate social relations of production, including the artistic sensibilities of both film-makers and audience, and those located within the network of social practices constituting both the industry and the wider social formation (a conceptualisation which avoids the reified and consensual connotations of the term "society").' What follows is a good deal less scrupulous about delineating all these practices, and a good deal less bound by fustian jargon, with snappy sub-headings ('Do detectives think?') and some determinedly evocative prose ('The private eye ... fought the mean city's corruption with integrity, pride and a hard head for blows, booze and broads'). One might also detect a 'consensual connotation' in a sentence like: 'The G-Man films chimed in with a change in public consciousness.'

But the essay is incisive and illuminating enough as it rattles through the changing image of the movie cop, more so at least than the didactic chapters on the working class and blacks in Hollywood. In the latter, by Mary Ellison, consensual connotations run amok along with quotes from a confusing battery of sources. And when, in the course of praising certain black actors, the author contrives to lump together performances that were true to type and those that supposedly used their types to mock the white man's typing, not just methodology but basic reasoning seems to be thrown to the winds.

Contradictions positively throng through the final chapter, on 'Cars in American films', itself a rough switchback ride (hopefully described as 'allusive' by the editors in their introduction), which goes from this, 'The oneiric and concrete constitute a poetics rather than a semantics,' to this, 'as Christian Metz says, "the cinema is language, above and

beyond any particular effect of montage".'

As a footnote to the curious changes of perspective between and within these essays, it is noticeable how ambivalent is the attitude towards another study like Andrew Bergman's *We're in the Money: Depression America and Its Films*. This is rejected by P. H. Melling in his chapter on the 30s, 'The mind of the mob', for being too-mechanistic in seeing political events reflected in popular culture—though Melling quotes Bergman's (mis) description of the ending of *You Only Live Once* as an example of late 30s scapegoating. But Robert Reiner, in his piece on cops, approves Bergman's equation of the G-Man films with 'a general adulation of benevolent Federal government which pervaded many movie genres following the New Deal.'

Not surprisingly, the essays which work best in this context scarcely discuss films at all. Christopher Frayling's chapter on 'The American Western and American Society' is simply an extended critique of another theorist, Will Wright, commending him for having moved analysis of the Western away from auteurs and 'foundation myths', but suggesting that his account of social changes through changes in West-

ern plots does not take sufficient account of Hollywood's own evolution: 'The American Western has been treated as part of a "given" folk culture, to the exclusion of other possibilities, for too long ... it is time to treat it as part of an entrepreneurial culture as well.' Connected with this are two excellent pieces by Richard Maltby, 'The political economy of Hollywood: the studio system' and 'Made for each other: the melodrama of Hollywood and the House Committee on Un-American Activities, 1947'. In the first, he examines the tension between the conventional, centralist business practices of Eastern film merchandisers and the personal, competitive 'style' of West Coast studio moguls. The second argues that the Un-American Activities Committee, peripheral rather than central to Washington politics at the time, needed a victim like Hollywood to ratify its own form of political melodrama. And Hollywood unwittingly collaborated. 'The rhetoric of both parties echoed each other ... By the nature of their performance, the Hollywood Ten succeeded in establishing the Committee's melodramatic persuasion.' Not only the most original, this is also the most entertaining writing in the book.

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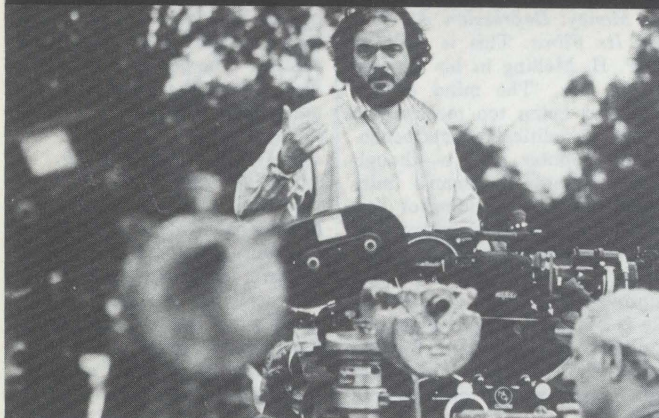
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LETTERS

Louise Brooks

SIR,—In the course of his just appraisal of Louise Brooks' vignettes, *Lulu in Hollywood* (SIGHT AND SOUND, Summer 1982), John Russell Taylor regrettably reiterates her conspiracy theory—that the studios destroyed 'difficult' stars like Gish and Gilbert. The notion is only 'persuasive' if one falls under the undoubted spell of what Miss Brooks calls her 'recollection', although as she was out of Hollywood for the critical years of these stars' eclipse, or did not see some of the films (*The Wind*, for example) until several decades had gone by, she is hardly a first-hand witness to their 'ruination'.

Apart from rumours—like those started by Garson Kanin in his deplorable work of 'faction', *Moviola*—all the evidence is to the contrary. Age and changing tastes played a bigger role than the alleged spleen of MGM executives. Russell Taylor himself finds it hard to credit that MGM 'sabotaged' Gish. Having been exhaustively through *all* the MGM files on Gilbert, I can state that the facts preserved therein at the time (late 1920s-early 1930s) acquit Mayer of any such intent. He disliked Gilbert for well-known reasons: but as he was committed to pay him \$250,000 for each of six pictures—a colossal sum in its day—his business sense committed him to making the best of Gilbert, not turning him into an embarrassing liability; Gilbert's 'Great Lover' stereotype did not travel well in the greater realism of the talkies and his own remorseful refuge in alcohol completed the sad fall. *SIGHT AND SOUND* should not add to or abet the fancies of writers which are coloured by their own experiences of destruction, self-wrought or otherwise.

Yours faithfully,
ALEXANDER WALKER
London W9

Regional Theatres

SIR,—I am not quite sure how well they fit into a 'debate-centred film culture' but what a nice surprise to find one of my *Steam Railway* programmes prominently featured in the lead photo of Cinema City, Norwich ('Who Only the West End Know', Tim Pulleine, Summer 1982). These shows of old film of steam railway engines formed part of the original Regional Film Theatre pattern 15 years ago; they are still quite extensively featured at Regional Theatres. The purpose, first tried at the National Film Theatre, is to illustrate how archive material can be used to illustrate a particular theme or aspect of research—a part of the RFT movement which can occasionally get overlooked. And at least it does better business than *Citizens Band*!

Tim Pulleine says 'the under-

taking is deemed not to have met with great initial success'; so perhaps a few facts would be in order. The first Regional Film Theatre was at Bristol; I, for one, am not ashamed of what has happened there. Indeed, it was I who drafted the original memorandum suggesting the establishment of a major Film Centre in Bristol back in 1971, based entirely on the success of the initial project. (I am amused to note that the same memorandum also suggested the setting up of a Museum of the Moving Image on the South Bank!) The second RFT was at Norwich—at the Noverre Cinema. We did such a good job there that Tim Pulleine now reports 'it is from the Noverre that the real competition comes' against the later project of Cinema City. The third theatre we opened was at Nottingham with a marvellous man called Douglas Tansley; Tim Pulleine, fifteen years later, says the Nottingham Film Theatre 'has, says its organiser Doug Tansley, built up over the years a sizeable if fluctuating body of regular patrons.' I even note that he is 'modestly sceptical about what he conceives as "head office" pressure for a more overtly educational approach.' Not much has changed since I was around.

Of course, mistakes were made in the early years. There was too much direct political pressure in the first halcyon days; too many schemes were launched in highly unsuitable multi-purpose halls; deals were done without sufficient guarantees that Film would have its proper role in the scheme of things. But, in the first report on the Regional Film Theatres, I said that at least half the schemes launched would not survive. At its peak, there were 48 Regional Film Theatres; today there are 30. All the projects selected for analysis by Tim Pulleine in 1982 were established by 'the first wave of RFTs which came into being in the late 60s.' Can't have been *that* bad.

Yours faithfully,
JOHN HUNTLEY
London N6

SIR,—While acknowledging that Tim Pulleine's survey of Regional Film Theatres was primarily concerned with their function as centres for film exhibition, we would like to draw attention to other important aspects of their operation.

For example, Cinema City, in addition to its main screenings, has attempted to develop a broad-based commitment to film and television culture, through its education activities and special events. The Education Subcommittee is involved in projects which range from one-day events aimed at schools to ten-week courses for the general public. Involvement in the latter is not, as the article suggests, merely on the level of 'participation'—on

the contrary, they are instigated, organised and staffed by members of the Sub-Committee. A highly successful five-week course on 'Women and Independent Cinema' (designed to coincide with the national 'Women Live' event) recently finished and plans for an autumn course on 'European Cinema in the 70s' are under way.

Special events fall into two categories: first, those which are arranged as part of the normal programming, such as days on 'Film Noir', 'The Popular Front' and 'Coming to Terms with Hollywood'; secondly, the Women's Film Weekend, an annual event which is organised by Cinewoman, a semi-autonomous collective. The Norwich Women's Film Weekend, a nationally recognised event, is one example of an attempt to focus attention on a specific area—that of women's involvement in the independent and commercial cinema, both past and present.

Though these different events are organised in a variety of ways and with different levels of involvement on the part of the Cinema City management, they are all regarded as integral to the Cinema's overall function.

If Regional Film Theatres are to establish a specificity over and against the commercial circuit

cinemas, it will not be purely through their alternative programming policy. Important though this is, it is only one aspect of their operation and RFTs are unlikely to realise their full potential as centres of film culture without engaging with those wider issues which can most usefully be addressed in a broader educational context.

Yours faithfully,

TERESA GRIMES, NIGEL FLOYD
pp Cinewoman and Education
Sub-Committee, Cinema City,
Norwich

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

JEAN-PIERRE BERTHOME teaches cinema at Rennes University, contributes to *Positif* and *Film Dope* and has a book coming out on Jacques Demy . . . STEPHEN BOTTOMORE is researching into early stories and plays that contain references to the cinema . . . MICHAEL FFOLKES is a cartoonist for *Punch* (on films); also *Private Eye*, etc . . . ANTOINETTE MOSES is a freelance journalist and Director of the Cambridge Animation Festival . . . SATYAJIT RAY's latest film is *Home and the World*, from a Tagore story . . . STANLEY REED was Director of the British Film Institute from 1964 to 1972.

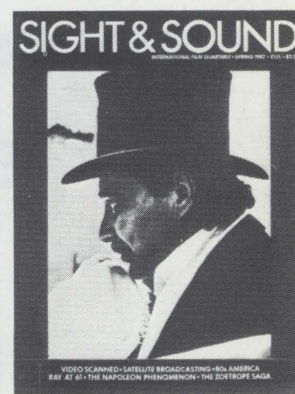
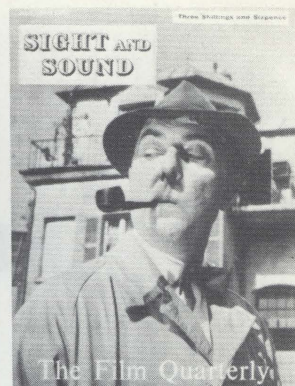
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UIP for *E.T.: the Extra-terrestrial*, *Pink Floyd: the Wall*, *Duel*, *Jaws*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, photograph of Steven Spielberg.
BRENT WALKER for *Brimstone and Treacle*.
CHILDREN'S FILM FOUNDATION for *Friend or Foe*.
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FILMVERLAG DER AUTOREN for photograph of Rainer Werner Fassbinder.
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NFA STILLS COLLECTION for 'Top Ten' stills, *Show People*, *Citizen Kane*, BBC and ITV opening programmes, photograph of Sir Denis Forman with Orson Welles, photographs of British film critics, Lumière films.
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SIGHT AND SOUND

A Fiftieth Anniversary Selection

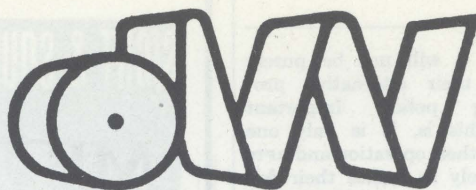
Edited by David Wilson

Over the years *Sight and Sound* has maintained a standard which has earned the magazine an international reputation and readership. Its list of contributors reads like a roll-call of distinguished writers on film: from critics like Graham Greene, Alistair Cooke, Richard Winnington, James Agee, Gavin Lambert, Ken Tynan, Tony Richardson and Penelope Houston, to film-makers like Alfred Hitchcock, Satyajit Ray, or Eisenstein himself, not to mention the great polemicist the theoretician of documentary, John Grierson. *Sight and Sound's* international reputation rests on the fact that, although it has been in the forefront of debates and controversies about the cinema, it has never rigidly adhered to a particular 'line'; it has always been an open forum for good writing on film. The magazine's fiftieth anniversary provides now an ideal opportunity for collecting some of this writing in an anthology illustrated with stills from the films discussed. 328 pages, 73 halftones. £12.50 (in US: \$19.95)



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TSW (Television South West) and South West Arts are jointly offering an award of £4,000 to an independent film-maker or professional artist wishing to extend his/her work by the use of new media. Group applications will also be considered. It is intended that the final product will be screened by TSW and a mutually agreeable 'slot' will be provided to accommodate this. Where appropriate TSW would be prepared to provide certain facilities and to assist in the production.

Applicants are invited to submit proposals in the form of treatment, story-board or script (whichever is appropriate) for a work of not more than one hour's duration. These proposals should be accompanied by relevant examples of previous work. It is hoped that applicants will bear in mind the unique opportunity which the nature of the final broadcast offers. Applicants who are eligible must be living and/or working in the TSW contract area.

The closing date for entries is the end of December 1982. Entries will be assessed jointly by TSW and South West Arts. Projects will be assessed according to the guidelines published by South West Arts in the South West Film Directory.

The award is seen as a pilot scheme for possible continuation and development on an annual basis. It reflects TSW's willingness to give independent film-makers access to broadcast TV and to acquaint a wider audience with the new and exciting work that has in large part been argued for by the Independent Film-makers' Association.

Application forms and guidelines can be obtained from:
Chris Rodrigues, Film Officer, South West Arts,
23 Southernhay East, Exeter EX1 1QG.
Tel: Exeter (0392) 38924.



South West Arts

CUBAN CINEMA

Following 'Inventing the Cinema', a weekend school on early film held at Dartington in 1980, South West Arts has organised an event to explore important developments in Third World Cinema. Cuban Cinema was singled out not as an example of a national 'art' cinema but rather to investigate its practice in the historical and institutional contexts of a developing socialist society. The lessons which could be learnt from such an investigation could be of use to those engaged in Britain in progressive cultural politics and media work.

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Speakers will be Robin Blackburn, Michael Chanan, Malcolm Coad. It is also expected that a prominent Cuban film-maker will be participating.

Send s.a.e. for details/application form to:

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ON NOW

●ANNIE

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)
Little Orphan Annie with her stray dog Sandy, her broken locket and her New Deal optimism would, one might suppose in this adaptation of the stage musical, be someone whose appeal was based chiefly on nostalgia. Director John Huston, however, has rarely surrendered unconditionally to sentimentality and his Annie, Aileen Quinn, is possessed of genuine spunk. She stands up to authority, and particularly the fulminating, dictatorial authority of Albert Finney's Oliver Warbucks—a millionaire who has invited an orphan to stay but is horrified to find that the creature is a girl orphan—with something of the spirit of Katharine Hepburn tackling Humphrey Bogart's intractable Charlie Allnut. Zestful entertainment if not, perhaps, the genuine article of years past. (Ann Reinking, Carol Burnett.)

●CAT PEOPLE

(UIP)
Paul Schrader's most interesting—mainly because it is his most unresolved, unassimilated—project to date. Until the film really loses its way about two-thirds through, Schrader adapts Lewton's original with perfect disregard of its near legendary status. In place of suggestive shadows, Schrader is disarmingly open about the mythology of the cat people and its sexual connotations. A prologue provides an explicit, only slightly tongue-in-cheek picture of what cat society was like. Then, with this cod anthropology as psychological background, the film explores how virginal Irena (Nastassia Kinski, who believes she'll turn back into an animal if she makes love to a human) and puritanical Dante-scholar Oliver (now a zoo-keeper, played by John Heard) find the excitement and repression they most desire in each other. The animal/sexual transformations/transfigurations are nicely realised, but Schrader seems unsure of what to do with the B-horror plot. In the end he falls back needlessly on the original. (Malcolm McDowell, Annette O'Toole.)

●ROLLOVER

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)
Alan J. Pakula, who in 1971 had Jane Fonda stand up to the terrors of the night in *Clute*, and Jane Fonda herself, whose company, IPC, financed this latest night-time vision, have come up with a fascinating, unclassifiable, apocalyptic movie. With much else besides, it is half a straightforward, driving sermon (the Wickedness of High

Finance) and half a serpentine, ambiguous thriller (High Finance and all its works becomes a mystical Leviathan—the huge whale in the New York Museum of Natural History, glimpsed in an early scene). The Arabs refuse to 'rollover' (reinvent their capital deposited in an American bank) owing to some double-dealing which leads neophyte banker Jane Fonda to challenge the beast. The Stock Exchange collapses... but Fonda and her partner, Kris Kristofferson, view the TV images of a floundering world as a curious new beginning. (Hume Cronyn.)

THE BEST LITTLE WHOREHOUSE IN TEXAS

(UIP)
Engaging performances from Burt Reynolds and Dolly Parton as the sheriff and the madam bedded in romantic partnership, uncouth mugging from Dom DeLuise as the TV crusader who leads a clean-up campaign. The mixture typifies a musical high on jollity, low on country and western, and very uncertainly directed. (Charles Durning; director, Colin Higgins.)

BLADE RUNNER

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)
Harrison Ford, a licensed assassin traditionally armoured in dogged world-weariness, is cajoled into hunting a band of renegade robots, distinguishable mainly by their lack of capacity for world-weariness. Glitteringly and atmospherically designed; but ultimately mechanics win out over philosophising. (Sean Young, Rutger Hauer; director, Ridley Scott.)

BURDEN OF DREAMS

(Contemporary)
In his account of the making of *Fitzcarraldo*, Les Blank thankfully plays down the 'visionary' angle on Herzog's enterprise. Instead, we get an absorbing, often funny, sometimes exciting, diary of events and a useful clarification of the conflicts and problems which dogged the project. And Blank's customary enthusiasm, rather than respect, for the cultures he encounters provides a nice, if ultimately irreconcilable, counter-perspective. (Werner Herzog, Klaus Kinski, Jason Robards, Mick Jagger.)

CONAN THE BARBARIAN

(Fox)
John Milius' adaptation of Robert Howard's comic-strip creation is an indigestible blend of anti-liberal braggadocio, post-60s mysticism and *echt*-60s blockbusting. Arnold Schwarzenegger is the Original Nietzschean Man. (James Earl Jones, Max von Sydow.)

DEATHTRAP

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)
Sidney Lumet's fastidiously carpentered adaptation of the Ira Levin stage success is an agreeable set of Chinese boxes: a mystery playwright fashions a murder mystery about a mystery playwright who fashions... etc, etc. Michael Caine inspires confidence that matters will not run off the tracks. (Christopher Reeve, Dyan Cannon.)

DEATH VENGEANCE

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)
Lewis Teague's first feature

without a John Sayles script proves a confused vigilante movie. The hero's declaration of war on 'punks' (with Tom Skerritt as the Charles Bronson lookalike) becomes the excuse for his clearly racist campaign. The film tries to open up certain contradictions, but its energies are ultimately misdirected. (Michael Sarrazin.)

FIREFOX

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)
Further retrogressive derring-do from Clint Eastwood, regressing all the way to the Cold War. Apart from some jokes about a pile-up of disguises that just about bury the hero, the sentiments and the politics seem intended seriously. (Freddie Jones, Warren Clarke, Kenneth Colley; director, Clint Eastwood.)

GREASE 2

(UIP)
More unwelcome nostalgia, updated to 1961 and drafting a new batch of campus rock 'n' rollers. With synthetic music, and as directed by the choreographer of *Grease*, this sequel is twice as graceless. (Maxwell Caulfield, Michelle Pfeiffer; director, Patricia Birch.)

HANKY PANKY

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)
One long screech: a comedy-thriller designed solely as a vehicle for Gene Wilder's uninhibited hysteria is bad enough, one that so thoroughly submerges everyone else (Richard Widmark, Gilda Radner) is so much worse. (Director, Sidney Poitier.)

HEATWAVE

(Mainline)
Phillip Noyce's slightly disappointing follow-up to *Newsfront*. Nothing much wrong with the way this noir-ish Australian thriller looks; but its ambitious social and political implications, built up round the chicanery attendant upon a big development project, are let down by stereotyped characters. (Judy Davis, Richard Moir.)

THE LINE

(Enterprise)
A not unsympathetic but curiously ineffectual throwback to the days of campus protest. Set in an army stockade in 1969, with Vietnam, flower-power and common humanity combining to make the prisoners rebel against the military mentality, it fritters itself away in sentimentality and special pleading. (Russ Thacker; director, Robert J. Siegel.)

PINK FLOYD: THE WALL

(UIP)
The film of the double album which shows up all concerned in the most reactionary light: Roger Waters flounders in woman-hating self-pity; Gerald Scarfe turns up particularly weedy examples of his animated savagery; and Alan Parker revels in the chance to make a feature-length TV commercial. (Bob Geldof, Bob Hoskins.)

REMEMBRANCE

(Mainline)
Multi-layered portrait of naval recruits on the town before sailing from Portsmouth. Attractively ambitious, though burdened by botched realism and awkward symbols. Written by

Hugh Stoddart, directed by Colin Gregg, and financed by Channel 4. (John Altman, Al Ashton.)

RICHARD PRYOR LIVE ON THE SUNSET STRIP

(Cinegate)
Acerbically funny one-man show, a bit muffled by the comedian's attempt to outdo Lenny Bruce in reiterated profanity and director Joe Layton's tendency to overdo the reaction shots of the adulatory audience.

ROCKY III

(UIP)
Rocky Balboa, like Sylvester Stallone's direction, finds life tough at the top. He is required to take off flab for yet another championship fight; the film, contrariwise, puts it on in an endless padding of montage sequences. (Sylvester Stallone, Carl Weathers, Talia Shire.)

THE SECRET OF NIMH

(UIP)
The secret of Disney largely eludes the ex-employees responsible for this awkward animation feature with a cast of rodents and a touch of sword and sorcery. Vintage techniques are proudly invoked, but the story desperately needs loving care. (Director, Don Bluth.)

SOME KIND OF HERO

(UIP)
Rickety mixture of serious thoughts about Vietnam veterans, abject sentimentality and buffoonish comedy, closely following James Kirkwood's novel. Crumbs of comfort from Richard Pryor, but Margot Kidder is totally wasted. (Director, Michael Pressman.)

THE THING

(UIP)
John Carpenter ventures into the Antarctic wastes where the Hawksian group once trod. Hard to miss *The Thing* here, so laboriously (though confusingly) explicit are the special effects; but the group is just about invisible. (Kurt Russell.)

36 CHOWRINGHEE LANE

(Cinegate)
An ageing Anglo-Indian teacher (Jennifer Kendal) finds herself being edged out of her job at a Calcutta girls' school and tricked, cruelly, by a former pupil and her insufferable boyfriend. An affecting directorial debut by the Bengali actress Aparna Sen. (Dhritiman Chatterjee, Debashree Roy.)

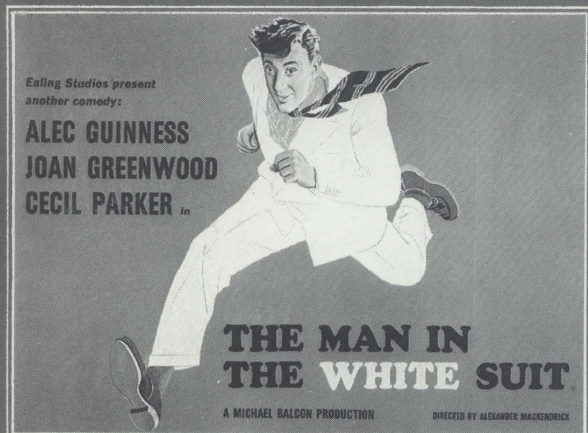
WHO DARES WINS

(Rank)
Euan Lloyd's salute to the SAS, cinematically antiquated and with hawkish politics poking unappealingly through the thin cloak of fiction. The internationally assorted cast (Lewis Collins, Judy Davis, Richard Widmark) hardly aids credibility. (Director, Ian Sharp.)

THE WITNESS

(Cinegate)
Shelved for nine years by Hungarian officialdom, this 1969 satire on the labyrinthine ways of Stalinist bureaucracy is somewhat uneven in approach but often bleakly acute and sometimes funny in its incidental invention. (Ferenc Kállai, Lajos Óze; director, Péter Bacsó.)

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